3/6

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

Uniform with this Volume

DON QUIXOTE
By CERVANTES. Abridged

THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS
By FENIMORE COOPER

OLD ST PAUL'S
By W. HARRISON AINSWORTH

VILLETTE
By CHARLOTTE BRONTË

KENILWORTH
By SIR WALTER SCOTT

THE PRISONER OF ZENDA
By ANTHONY HOPE

OLIVER TWIST
By CHARLES DICKENS

MR MIDSHIPMAN EASY
By CAPTAIN MARRYAT

ADAM BEDE
By GEORGE ELIOT

THE TOWER OF LONDON
By W. HARRISON AINSWORTH

THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP
By CHARLES DICKENS

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS
By GEORGE ELIOT

SILAS MARNER AND SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE
By GEORGE ELIOT

JANE EYRE
By CHARLOTTE BRONTË

WINDSOR CASTLE
By W. HARRISON AINSWORTH

WESTWARD HO!
By CHARLES KINGSLEY

A full list of the series will be sent on request

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

ABRIDGED

GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
LONDON TORONTO BOMBAY SYDNEY

The English text revised for this translation is used by arrangement with the owners of the copyright.

First published July 1926
by GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
182 *High Holborn, London, W.C.*1
Reprinted : March 1929; *February* 1934; *February* 1940

Copyright. All rights reserved

Made in Great Britain. Printed by Jarrold & Sons, Ltd., Norwich

NOTE

WHEN undertaking the task of shortening for the purposes of this edition a lengthy story like *The Three Musketeers*, which depends for its chief appeal on the skilful linking of incident to incident in a closely woven plot, it was at once evident that to interfere with the sequence of events would be to cripple a masterpiece. Care has therefore been taken to preserve the original chain of incidents as far as possible, and the actual abridgement has been confined almost exclusively to such passages of descriptive narrative and dialogue as are not of vital importance to the working out of the plot.

It may be advisable, also, to point out to the reader that certain inconsistencies in the story are due to Dumas himself, and are not faults in the translation or abridgement.

PREFACE

In which it is proved that, notwithstanding their names in "os" and in "is," the heroes of the story we are going to relate have nothing mythological about them.

A SHORT time ago, while making researches in the Royal Library for my history of Louis XIV, I stumbled on the *Memoirs of M. d'Artagnan*, printed—like most works of that period, when authors preferred to tell the truth without going to the Bastille—at Amsterdam, by Pierre Rouge. The title pleased me. I took the *Memoirs* home, with the permission of the librarian, of course, and devoured them.

It is not my intention to make an analysis of this curious work here, and I merely refer those of my readers who appreciate the pictures of the epoch to its pages. They will find in them portraits drawn in a masterly style ; and although these sketches are, for the most part, traced on barrack-doors or the walls of the wineshop, they will find the portraits of Louis XIII, of Anne of Austria, of Richelieu, of Mazarin, and of most of the courtiers of the period, quite as faithful as those to be found in the history of M. Anquetil. But, as is well known, what strikes the capricious mind of the poet does not always create an impression upon the generality of readers. Now, while admiring, as no doubt others will admire, the details which we have pointed out, what most attracted us was a matter to which no one had previously paid the slightest attention.

D'Artagnan relates that at his first visit to M. de Tréville, the captain of the King's Musketeers, he met in the antechamber three young men, serving in the illustrious corps which he desired to join, called Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

We were much struck by these names, and at once conceived that they were pseudonyms under which D'Artagnan had disguised persons perhaps illustrious ; unless, indeed, the bearers of those borrowed names had themselves chosen them on the day when, through caprice, discontent, or want of fortune, they had donned the simple garb of the musketeer.

From that moment we could not rest until we had found, in contemporaneous work, some trace of the extraordinary names which had aroused our curiosity.

The catalogue alone of the books which we read in order to arrive at this end would fill a whole chapter, which might prove very instructive, but which would certainly not amuse our readers. We shall therefore confine ourselves to saying that at the moment when, discouraged by so many fruitless investigations, we were about to abandon our researches, we at last found —thanks to the counsels of our learned friend, Paulin Pâris— a folio manuscript, bearing the title of *Memoir of the Comte de la Fère, concerning some Events which took place in France toward the End of the Reign of Louis XIII and the Beginning of the Reign of Louis XIV.*

Imagine how great was our joy when, on perusing this manuscript, we found at the twentieth page the name of Athos, at the twenty-seventh that of Porthos, and at the twenty-first that of Aramis.

The discovery of an unknown manuscript, at a period when the science of history is carried to such a high degree, appeared to us almost miraculous. We therefore hastened to ask permission to print it, with the view of one day presenting ourselves at the Academy of Inscriptions and Belles-lettres with the baggage of others ; should we fail, which was probable, to enter the French Academy with our own literary baggage. We must say that this permission was graciously accorded ; and we state this, here, in order to give a public contradiction to those ill-natured persons who pretend that we live under a Government little disposed to recognize the rights of men of letters.

It is the first part of this precious manuscript which we offer to-day to our readers, restoring the title which is suited to it, engaging ourselves, if, as we do not doubt, this first part obtains the success which it deserves, to publish the second without delay.

In the meantime, as the godfather is a second father, we beg our readers to put upon us, and not the Comte de la Fère, responsibility for having pleased or bored him.

This being understood, let us pass on to our story.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE THREE PRESENTS OF M. D'ARTAGNAN THE ELDER	11
II.	THE ANTECHAMBER OF M. DE TRÉVILLE	22
III.	THE AUDIENCE	26
IV.	THE SHOULDER OF ATHOS, THE BALDRICK OF PORTHOS, AND THE POCKET-HANDKERCHIEF OF ARAMIS	33
V.	THE KING'S MUSKETEERS AND THE CARDINAL'S GUARDS	39
VI.	HIS MAJESTY LOUIS THE THIRTEENTH	46
VII.	THE MUSKETEERS AT HOME	50
VIII.	A COURT INTRIGUE	54
IX.	D'ARTAGNAN REVEALS HIMSELF	59
X.	A MOUSETRAP IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY	64
XI.	THE PLOT DEVELOPS	71
XII.	GEORGE VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM	81
XIII.	M. BONACIEUX	88
XIV.	THE MAN OF MEUNG	93
XV.	MEN OF GOWN AND MEN OF SWORD	99
XVI.	THE KEEPER OF THE SEALS	105
XVII.	THE BONACIEUX HOUSEHOLD	111
XVIII.	LOVER AND HUSBAND	119
XIX.	A JOURNEY	124
XX.	THE COUNTESS DE WINTER	136
XXI.	THE BALLET OF "LA MERLAISON"	143
XXII.	THE RENDEZVOUS	148
XXIII.	THE PAVILION	154
XXIV.	PORTHOS	160
XXV.	THE THESIS OF ARAMIS	171
XXVI.	THE WIFE OF ATHOS	178
XXVII.	THE RETURN	189
XXVIII.	HUNTING FOR EQUIPMENT	198
XXIX.	MILADY	203
XXX.	FRENCH AND ENGLISH	207
XXXI.	THE PROCURATOR'S DINNER	212
XXXII.	MAID AND MISTRESS	218

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXXIII.	TREATING OF THE EQUIPMENT OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS	224
XXXIV.	AT NIGHT ALL CATS ARE GREY	229
XXXV.	THE DREAM OF REVENGE	235
XXXVI.	MILADY'S SECRET	240
XXXVII.	HOW, WITHOUT PUTTING HIMSELF OUT, ATHOS FOUND HIS EQUIPMENT	244
XXXVIII.	A VISION	249
XXXIX.	A TERRIBLE VISION	255
XL.	THE SIEGE OF LA ROCHELLE	260
XLI.	THE ANJOU WINE	268
XLII.	THE INN OF THE COLOMBIER ROUGE	273
XLIII.	OF THE UTILITY OF STOVE-PIPES	277
XLIV.	A CONJUGAL SCENE	282
XLV.	THE SAINT-GERVAIS BASTION	286
XLVI.	THE MUSKETEERS HOLD A COUNCIL	289
XLVII.	A FAMILY AFFAIR	299
XLVIII.	FATALITY	306
XLIX.	A CHAT BETWEEN BROTHER AND SISTER	312
L.	"OFFICER!"	316
LI.	THE FIRST DAY OF CAPTIVITY	321
LII.	THE SECOND DAY OF CAPTIVITY	325
LIII.	THE THIRD DAY OF CAPTIVITY	329
LIV.	THE FOURTH DAY OF CAPTIVITY	335
LV.	THE FIFTH DAY OF CAPTIVITY	340
LVI.	A CLASSICAL TRAGEDY DODGE	346
LVII.	THE EVASION	350
LVIII.	WHAT HAPPENED AT PORTSMOUTH ON THE TWENTY-THIRD OF AUGUST, 1628	356
LIX.	IN FRANCE	363
LX.	THE CARMELITE CONVENT OF BÉTHUNE	366
LXI.	TWO VARIETIES OF DEMONS	375
LXII.	THE DROP OF WATER	378
LXIII.	THE MAN WITH THE RED CLOAK	388
LXIV.	THE TRIAL	392
LXV.	THE EXECUTION	397
	CONCLUSION	401
	EPILOGUE	409

THE THREE MUSKETEERS

CHAPTER I

THE THREE PRESENTS OF M. D'ARTAGNAN THE ELDER

ON the first Monday of April, 1625, the little town of Meung, where the author of the *Roman de la Rose* was born, seemed to be in as complete a state of revolution as if the Huguenots had come to make a second Rochelle of it. Several citizens, seeing the women running away in the direction of the High Street, and hearing the children crying on the doorsteps, hastened to don their cuirasses, and seizing musket or partizan, in order to give themselves courage, made their way in the direction of the hostelry of the Franc Meunier, before which was gathered a crowd, noisy, compact, and full of curiosity, which increased every minute.

In those times panics were frequent, and few days passed without some town or another registering in its archives some event of this kind. There were the nobles who made war among themselves; there was the King who waged war against the Cardinal; there was the Spaniard who waged war against the King. Then, in addition to these underhand or public, secret or open wars, there were the robbers, the beggars, the Huguenots, the wolves, and the lackeys, who levied wars against every one. The citizens always armed themselves against the robbers, the wolves, and the lackeys; often against the nobles and the Huguenots, sometimes against the King, but never against the Cardinal and the Spaniard. The consequence of this habit was that on the aforesaid first Monday of the month of April, 1625, the citizens, hearing a noise, and seeing neither the black and yellow pennant, nor the livery of the Duc de Richelieu, hurried off in the direction of the Franc Meunier. Arrived there, every one was able to perceive the cause of the bustle.

A young man—let us trace his portrait with a single stroke of the pen—imagine a Don Quixote of eighteen, a Don Quixote without his corselet, his hauberk, or his cuisses; a Don Quixote

in a blue woollen doublet, the colour of which had faded to such an extent as to have assumed a shade between the lees of wine and a celestial azure. His face was long and dark, his cheek bones high, sign of astuteness. Too big for a youth, too small for a grown-up man, he would have been taken by an experienced observer for a farmer's son on his travels, but for the long rapier which, attached to a leathern baldrick, struck against the calves of its owner when he was on foot, and against the shaggy coat of his steed when he was on horseback. For our young man had a steed, and this steed was, in fact, such a remarkable animal that it attracted attention. It was a Béarn pony of from twelve to fourteen years old, yellow of coat, without any hair on its tail, but not without wind-galls on its legs, and though going with his head lower than his knees, making a martingale useless, he could do his eight leagues a day. Unfortunately the good qualities of this horse were so well hidden underneath his strange coat and manner of going, that at a time when every one was a connoisseur of horseflesh the appearance of the aforesaid pony at Meung produced an unfavourable impression which extended to its master.

And this feeling was all the more painful to young D'Artagnan (for thus was the Don Quixote of this other Rosinante named) because he was aware of the ridicule cast upon him, good horseman as he was, by such a steed; indeed, he had heaved a deep sigh on accepting the gift at the hands of M. d'Artagnan the elder. He knew that such an animal was worth at the most twenty *livres*; it is true that the words by which it was accompanied were above all price.

"My son," had said the Gascon gentleman, in that Béarn accent which Henri IV never lost, "this horse was born in the house of your father thirteen years ago, and he has remained there ever since, which should make you love him. Never sell him; allow him to die quietly and honourably of old age; and if you go campaigning with him, spare him as you would spare an old servant. At Court," continued M. d'Artagnan, "if you should have the honour to go there, an honour to which you are entitled by your old nobility, sustain worthily your name of nobleman, which has been borne worthily by your ancestors for the last five hundred years. Suffer nothing from any unless it be from the Cardinal and the King. Remember well that it is by courage, and by courage alone, that a nobleman makes his way to-day. You are young; you ought to be brave for two reasons: first, because you are a Gascon, and, secondly, because

you are my son. Do not fear a quarrel, but rather seek opportunities. I have taught you how to handle a rapier; you have thews of iron, a wrist of steel; fight upon every occasion; fight all the more because duels are forbidden, and it consequently requires double courage to fight. I can, my son, only give you fifteen crowns, my horse, and the advice which you have heard. Turn all this to account, and live happily and long. I have only one word to add, and this is to put an example before you, not my own, for I never appeared at Court, and merely fought through the wars of religion as a volunteer, but that of M. de Tréville, who in old days was my neighbour. He is now Captain of the Musketeers; that is to say, the chief of a legion of Cæsars, which the King holds in great esteem, and which is dreaded by the Cardinal, who, as every one knows, does not dread many things. M. de Tréville, too, gains ten thousand crowns a year; he is therefore a great noble. He began like you; go and see him with this letter, and take him for your model."

Upon this M. d'Artagnan presented his son with his own rapier, kissed him tenderly on both cheeks, and gave him his blessing. The same day the young man set out, furnished with the three paternal presents—the fifteen crowns, the horse, and the letter for M. de Tréville, to say nothing of the advice.

With such a *vade mecum* D'Artagnan both morally and physically was an exact copy of the hero of Cervantes. Don Quixote took windmills for giants and sheep for armies; D'Artagnan took every smile for an insult and every look for a provocation. As he alighted at the door of the Franc Meunier at Meung without landlord or stable-boy coming to hold his stirrup, D'Artagnan perceived at a window on the ground-floor a gentleman, well made and handsome, but with a rather surly face, who was talking with two persons who appeared to listen to him with deference. D'Artagnan naturally thought that he was the subject of this conversation. This time he was only half wrong; it was not he who was in question, but his horse. The gentleman seemed to be enumerating all its qualities, and his listeners, who, as I have said, treated him with marked deference, repeatedly broke into laughter. Now, as half a smile was enough to excite the irascibility of the young man, it is easy to understand the effect of this noisy hilarity upon him.

However, D'Artagnan proceeded first of all to examine the appearance of the impertinent person who was ridiculing him. He fixed his haughty eye on the stranger, and saw before him a man from forty to forty-five years of age, with black, piercing eyes, a

pale complexion, a pronounced nose, and a carefully trimmed black moustache ; he was dressed in a violet doublet and hose, with aiguillettes of the same colour, but without any other ornaments than the customary slashes through which his shirt appeared. The doublet and hose, although new, had the crumpled appearance of a travelling suit long kept folded in a portmanteau. D'Artagnan noticed all this with the rapidity of a keen observer, and as if moved by some instinctive feeling that this man was destined to exercise a powerful influence over his future life.

At the moment that D'Artagnan turned his eyes on the gentleman in the violet doublet he made a remark on the subject of the Béarn pony which made his two auditors laugh louder than ever, while he himself allowed a pale smile, if one may be excused the expression, to flit over his face. This time there could be no doubt ; D'Artagnan was really insulted. Full of this conviction, he pulled his *béret* over his eyes, and, endeavouring to copy some of the courtly airs of travelling nobles which he had noted in Gascony, he advanced, one hand on the hilt of his sword and the other stuck on his hip. Unfortunately, by degrees, as he advanced, rage blinded him more and more, and instead of the dignified and haughty speech he had prepared, he found nothing on the tip of his tongue but vulgar abuse, which he accompanied with an infuriated gesture.

" Hey, sir ! " he cried ; " you, sir, hiding behind the shutter ; yes, you, tell me what you are laughing about, so that we may laugh together."

The stranger looked at him for a moment with his faint smile, then withdrawing from the window he came forth slowly from the inn and approached within a couple of paces of D'Artagnan and his pony. His quiet manner and ironical expression had redoubled the hilarity of the persons he had been talking with, and who had remained at the window. D'Artagnan, on seeing him approach, drew his rapier a foot out of its scabbard.

" I do not often laugh, sir," replied the stranger, " as you may see by the expression of my face, but I beg to retain the privilege of laughing when I choose."

" And I," cried D'Artagnan, " will not permit people to laugh when it displeases me."

" Of a truth, sir," continued the stranger, more calm than ever, " you are perfectly right " ; and turning on his heel, he was about to re-enter the inn by the gate, under which D'Artagnan on arriving had remarked a saddled horse. But D'Artagnan was not the man to allow anyone who had treated him with such

insolence to escape. He drew his rapier entirely from its sheath, and pursued him, crying :

" Turn, turn thee, Sir Jester, lest I strike you behind ! "

" Strike me ! " said the other, wheeling round and looking at the young man with as much astonishment as contempt. " Come, my dear fellow, you are mad ! " Then, in a low voice and as if speaking to himself, he continued, " What a discovery for his Majesty, who is searching everywhere for gallant fellows as recruits for his Musketeers."

He had hardly finished when D'Artagnan made such a furious lunge at him that had he not sprung quickly back it is probable that he would have joked for the last time. The stranger, who then perceived that it was no laughing matter, drew his rapier, saluted his adversary, and gravely placed himself on guard. But at the same moment the two gentlemen at the window, accompanied by the landlord, rushed out and fell upon D'Artagnan, striking him with stick, shovel, and tongs. This caused so swift and complete a diversion to the attack that while D'Artagnan turned round to face this shower of blows his adversary sheathed his weapon with his wonted coolness, and from actor in became spectator of the fray. He acquitted himself of this part with his usual impassivity, but muttered the while :

" A plague on these Gascons ! Set him up on his orange horse and let him go."

" Not before I have killed thee, coward ! " cried D'Artagnan, facing as best he could his three enemies without recoiling.

" Another Gasconade," murmured the gentleman. " On my honour, these Gascons are incorrigible ! Continue the dance, then, since he desires it. When he is tired he will say that he has had enough."

But the stranger had yet to learn how obstinate was the fellow with whom he had to deal ; D'Artagnan was not a man to ask for mercy. The fight, therefore, lasted a few seconds longer ; at last D'Artagnan, exhausted, let go his rapier, which was broken by the blow of a cudgel as it fell. Almost at the same moment another blow cut open his forehead, and brought him to the ground, bleeding and fainting.

It was just then that, as we have seen, the people came running from all sides. The landlord, fearing a scandal, with the aid of his servants carried the wounded man into the kitchen, where some care was bestowed on him.

As for the gentleman, he returned to the window, and looked at the crowd with a certain amount of impatience. " Well, how

is that madman getting on ? " said he, on hearing the door open, and addressing himself to the landlord who made his appearance.

" Your Excellency is unhurt ? " asked the latter.

" Yes, quite safe and sound, my dear host ; there is need rather for me to ask you how fares our young man ? "

" He is better," replied the landlord ; " he has fainted right away."

" Indeed," said the gentleman.

" But before fainting he summoned up his whole strength to challenge you."

" He is the very devil in person," cried the stranger.

" Oh ! no, your Excellency, he is no devil," returned the host, with a grin of contempt ; " for while he was unconscious we searched him, and there is in his valise but one shirt, and in his purse but eleven crowns, which did not hinder him from saying before he fainted that if such an affair had happened in Paris you would have repented of it at once, whereas here you will repent of it later."

" Then," said the stranger coldly, " he is some prince of the blood in disguise."

" I tell you that, sir," replied the host, " so that you may be on your guard."

" He mentioned no names in his rage ? "

" Yes ; he struck his pocket, and said, ' We shall see what M. de Tréville will say to this insult to his *protégé*.' "

" M. de Tréville," said the unknown, becoming attentive. " Let us see, my dear host ; while yon young man was in a faint did you search that pocket, and what was in it ? "

" A letter addressed to M. de Tréville, Captain of Musketeers."

" Truly ? "

" It is as I have the honour to inform your Excellency."

The landlord, who was not endowed with much perspicacity, did not remark the expression which these words had brought to the features of the stranger, who knitted his brows as if uneasy.

" The devil ! " murmured he between his teeth, " can De Tréville have sent this Gascon after me ? He is very young ; but a sword-thrust is a sword-thrust, no matter what the age of him who gives it ; a feeble obstacle often suffices to defeat a great design."

The stranger reflected for several seconds ; then,

" Come, mine host," said he, " can you not rid me of this mad-

man? I cannot in conscience kill him, and yet," he added, with a threatening expression, "he is in my way—where is he?"

"In my wife's room, where they are patching up his wounds."

"His goods and his valise are with him? He has not taken off his doublet?"

"On the contrary, they are all in the kitchen; but as he is in your way——"

"No doubt. He created a scandal in your inn, which honest people cannot put up with. Make me out my bill and warn my servants."

"What! You leave us already, sir?"

"You are well aware of that, since I ordered you to saddle my horse. Have I not been obeyed?"

"Certainly, as your Excellency may see. Your horse is under the gateway, all ready to start."

"Good; do as I told you, then."

"Dear me," said the landlord to himself, "can he be frightened at that lad?" But an imperious glance from the stranger cut him short. He saluted him humbly and left the room.

"Milady [1] must not be perceived by this young scamp," continued the stranger; "she must pass soon; she is already late. It will be better for me to ride on and meet her. If I only knew the contents of this letter addressed to M. de Tréville!" And the stranger, still muttering to himself, went toward the kitchen.

Meanwhile, the landlord, who never doubted that it was the presence of the young man which was driving the stranger from his inn, had ascended to his wife's room, where he found that D'Artagnan had recovered consciousness. Pointing out that the police might punish him for seeking a quarrel with a personage of quality, such as the stranger was bound to be, he advised him, in spite of his weakness, to continue his journey. D'Artagnan, half dazed, without his doublet, and with his head swathed in bandages, got up, and, aided by the landlord, began to descend; but on reaching the kitchen the first thing he perceived was his antagonist, who was coolly talking beside the step of a heavy carriage drawn by two powerful Norman horses.

He was addressing a lady of from twenty to twenty-two years of age, whose head appeared as if framed by the window. We have already remarked with what rapidity D'Artagnan seized the expression of a countenance. At the first glance he saw that the lady was young and lovely. Her beauty struck him all the more

[1] We know that the appellation "Milady" is only used when followed by a family name. But we have found it thus in the manuscript.

as it was of a different character from that of the Southern country where D'Artagnan had been nourished. She was pale and fair ; her hair fell in long curls over her shoulders ; she had large, blue, languid eyes, rosy lips, and an alabaster hand ; she was speaking with great vivacity.

" So his Eminence orders me——" said the lady.

" To return at once to England, and to communicate with him personally should the Duke leave London."

" And with regard to my other instructions ? "

" They are enclosed in this box, which you will open only on the other side of the Channel."

" Very well ; and what are you going to do ? "

" I shall return to Paris."

" Without having chastised that insolent lad ? "

The stranger was about to reply, but before he could open his mouth D'Artagnan, who had heard everything, rushed from the door.

" It is the insolent lad who chastises others," he cried ; " and I hope that this time the person he intends to chastise will not escape, as he did the first time."

" Will not escape ? " returned the unknown, knitting his brows.

" No ; in presence of a woman I presume that you will not dare to run away."

" Remember," cried Milady, seeing the stranger place his hand on his sword, " that the least delay may be fatal to us all."

" You are right," cried the gentleman ; " set out on your side, and I will set out on mine."

And, saluting the lady, he sprang upon his horse, while the coachman applied his whip vigorously to his team. The two started off at a gallop in opposite directions.

" Hey, there, your bill ? " vociferated the landlord, whose affection for the traveller was changed into profound contempt as he saw him riding off without paying.

" Pay him, fellow," cried the stranger to his servant ; the latter flung two or three silver pieces at the feet of the landlord and galloped after his master.

" Ah, coward ! ah, wretch ! ah, false gentleman ! " cried D'Artagnan, rushing after the servant in his turn. But his wound had rendered him too weak to support such an exertion. He had hardly gone ten paces when his ears began to tingle ; he was seized with faintness, a cloud of blood passed before his eyes,

and he fell in the middle of the street, still exclaiming, " Coward ! coward ! "

" Truly, he is a coward," said the landlord, approaching D'Artagnan, and attempting by this flattery to make friends with the poor fellow.

" Yes, he is a coward," murmured D'Artagnan, " but she is very beautiful."

" Who ? " asked the landlord.

" Milady ! " stammered D'Artagnan, and he fainted a second time.

" Never mind," said the landlord to himself ; " I have lost two, but this one remains, whom I am sure to have for a few days. It will, at all events, be eleven crowns."

It will be remembered that this was just the sum which remained in D'Artagnan's purse. The landlord had counted upon an illness of eleven days at one crown per day, but he had reckoned without his traveller. The next day at five o'clock in the morning D'Artagnan rose, and, going into the kitchen, asked, in addition to other ingredients, for wine, and oil, and rosemary, with which he anointed his various wounds. Thanks to the efficacy of this balsam, and perhaps, also, to the absence of a doctor, D'Artagnan was on his legs the same evening, and was well-nigh recovered the next day.

But when he came to pay D'Artagnan found nothing in his pocket but his little threadbare purse and the eleven crowns it contained. As for the letter addressed to M. de Tréville, it had disappeared. The young man began looking for this letter with patience, emptying his pockets twenty times, rummaging his valise over and over again, and opening and shutting his purse ; but when he had acquired the certainty that the letter was gone he flew into a third paroxysm of rage which nearly necessitated a new application of the balsam ; for, on seeing this hot-headed young fellow warming up and threatening to smash everything in the establishment, the hotelkeeper seized a stake, his wife a broom, and the waiters the same sticks they had used two days before.

" My letter of recommendation ! " shouted D'Artagnan, " or I will spit you all like ortolans ! "

Unfortunately, a circumstance prevented the young man carrying out his threat, for, as we have already mentioned, his rapier had been broken in two in the first fight, a fact he had entirely forgotten. Thus, when D'Artagnan drew, he found but from eight to ten inches of his weapon left. This, however, would

probably not have held back our fiery young man had the landlord not reflected that his claim was quite just.

"Very true," he said, lowering his stake; "where is this letter?"

"Yes; where is this letter?" shouted D'Artagnan. "First of all, I warn you that this letter is for M. de Tréville, and that it must be found, or if it be not found, he will know how to find it himself."

This threat ended by intimidating the landlord. Next to the King and the Cardinal, M. de Tréville was the man whose name was most often repeated by both soldiers and civilians.

Throwing down his stake, then, and ordering his wife and his servants to lay aside their weapons, he set the example himself of looking for the lost letter.

"Did the letter contain anything precious?" he asked, after a useless search.

"Zounds! of course it did!" cried the Gascon, who counted upon it to make his way at Court. "It contained my fortune!"

"Bills upon Spain?" asked the landlord uneasily.

"Bills upon the private treasury of his Majesty," answered D'Artagnan, who, counting upon entering the King's service—thanks to this recommendation—considered that he might make this risky reply without telling a falsehood.

"The devil!" cried the landlord in despair.

"But the money is nothing," added D'Artagnan, with Gascon assurance; "it is the letter which is everything. I would sooner lose a thousand pistoles than the letter."

He might just as well have said twenty thousand, but he refrained, through juvenile modesty.

A sudden idea flashed across the mind of the landlord, who gave himself up for lost on finding nothing.

"This letter is not lost," he said.

"Ah!" ejaculated D'Artagnan.

"No; it has been taken from you."

"Taken! By whom?"

"By the gentleman of the day before yesterday. He went into the kitchen where your doublet was; he remained alone there, and I wager that it was he who stole it."

"Do you think so?" replied D'Artagnan, only half convinced; for he knew better than anyone that the letter had only a personal value, and contained nothing which could tempt cupidity. "You say, then," resumed D'Artagnan, "that you suspect that impertinent gentleman."

"I tell you I am certain," continued the landlord. "When I informed him that your lordship was the *protégé* of M. de Tréville, and that you had a letter for that illustrious gentleman, he seemed very uneasy, and asked me where the letter was, and immediately went down to the kitchen, where he knew your doublet to be."

"Then he is the thief!" cried D'Artagnan; "and I shall complain of him to M. de Tréville, and M. de Tréville will complain to the King."

He drew two crowns majestically from his pocket, gave them to the landlord, who accompanied him, hat in hand, to the door, and remounted his yellow steed, who bore him without further incident to the Porte Saint-Antoine, at Paris. There his owner sold him for three crowns, which was dear, seeing that D'Artagnan had ridden him hard the last stage. Indeed, the horse-jobber to whom D'Artagnan parted with him for the above sum did not conceal from the young man that he paid him this exorbitant price in consequence of the originality of his colour.

Thus D'Artagnan entered Paris on foot, carrying his little valise under his arm, and walked on until he found a room to let which suited the narrowness of his resources. This room was a sort of garret in the Rue des Fossoyeurs, near the Luxembourg. As soon as the earnest money had been paid, D'Artagnan took possession of his lodging, and passed the rest of the day stitching to his doublet and hose some braiding which his mother had cut off a nearly new doublet belonging to his father and had given to him in secret. This done, he went to have a new blade put to his sword. He then returned to the Louvre to ask the first musketeer he met the situation of M. de Tréville's *hôtel*, which he found to be close to the room he had hired. This circumstance appeared to him to augur well for the success of his journey. After this, satisfied with the manner in which he had behaved at Meung, without remorse for the past, confident in the present, and full of hope in the future, he went to bed and slept the sleep of the brave. His provincial slumber lasted until nine in the morning, at which hour he rose to call upon the famous M. de Tréville, whom his father had termed the third person in the realm.

CHAPTER II

THE ANTECHAMBER OF M. DE TRÉVILLE

M. DE TRÉVILLE had begun life like D'Artagnan—that is to say, without a farthing in his pocket; but with a reserve of courage, wit, and shrewdness, which often makes a Gascon squireen, whose inheritance is hope, rather than anything more substantial, better off than the richest gentleman of other provinces. His insolent gallantry, and still more, his insolent good fortune at a time when blows fell like hail, had carried him to the top of that ladder called Court favour.

Louis XIII was really attached to M. de Tréville, an attachment royal and egotistical, it is true, but an attachment, none the less. The fact is, that in those days of trouble it was most important to be surrounded by men of the character of M. de Tréville. De Tréville was one of those rare organizations which possessed the obedient intelligence of the dog, a blind valour, a quick eye, and a quick hand. Consequently Louis XIII made him the Captain of his Musketeers, which were to Louis XIII, as far as devotion, or rather fanaticism, was concerned, what the Ordinaries were to Henri III, and his Scots Guard to Louis XI.

The Cardinal, for his part, was no worse served than the King. When he saw the formidable body of picked men with which Louis XIII had surrounded himself, this second (or rather this first) King of France had determined to have his guard also. He had, therefore, his Musketeers as well as the King, and these rival powers were to be seen ransacking all the provinces of France, and even foreign countries, in quest of the most celebrated swordsmen. Often did Louis XIII and Richelieu, while playing at chess of an evening, dispute over the merits of those that served them. Each boasted the bearing and courage of his own following; and, while openly condemning duels and broils, they secretly encouraged their own men to fight, and felt severe disappointment or immoderate joy according as they were defeated or victorious.

Tréville had got round the weak side of his master, and it was to this address that he owed the constant favour of a monarch who has not left a reputation for being over-faithful in friendship. Tréville understood admirably the method of warfare practised in those days, when, if one did not live at the expense of one's enemies, one lived at the expense of one's fellow-countrymen.

His soldiers formed a legion of daredevils, obedient only to their leader.

Untidy, flushed with wine, and sword-scratched, the musketeers of the King, or rather of M. de Tréville, frequented the wineshops and the public places, shouting, twirling their moustaches, clanking their swords, and taking great pleasure in jostling the guards of the Cardinal and in crossing swords with them in the middle of the street. If they were killed they were certain to be wept for and revenged; if they did the killing, as more often happened, they were sure of not rotting in prison, for M. de Tréville was there to claim them. So M. de Tréville was lauded to the skies by his men, who adored him, and who, scamps though they were, trembled before him like schoolboys, and were ready to sacrifice their lives to wipe out his slightest reproach.

In addition to the *levers*[1] of the King and the Cardinal, Paris counted many smaller *levers*, among which that of M. de Tréville was the most frequented.

On the day that D'Artagnan presented himself the assembly was imposing, especially to a provincial; it is true that this provincial was a Gascon, and that the compatriots of D'Artagnan had the reputation of not being easily intimidated. Once within the massive door the visitor found himself in the midst of a troop of armed men crossing and recrossing in the courtyard, shouting, quarrelling, and gambling. None but an officer, a great noble, or a pretty woman could have found an easy way through these turbulent elements.

It was through this crowd, then, that our young man advanced, with beating heart, his long rapier held close to his thin leg, holding the brim of his hat with the other hand, and smiling with an embarrassed air. On passing one group he breathed more freely; but he perceived that people were turning round to look at him, and for the first time in his life D'Artagnan felt himself ridiculous.

On reaching the staircase it was still worse; on the bottom steps there were four musketeers who were amusing themselves thus. One of them stood upon the upper step, and, naked sword in hand, tried to prevent the other three from mounting. D'Artagnan at first took these swords for foils, but he soon perceived, by the scratches they made, that each weapon was well sharpened, and at each scratch both spectators and actors laughed uproariously. He who held the step kept his adversaries

[1] The morning attendance upon the King's rising in the bedchamber and anterooms, a custom which originated in the French Court of the seventeenth century and rapidly spread through the upper social circles.—TRANSLATOR.

at bay admirably. The spectators formed a circle round them; the rules of the game were that every one 'touched' should retire, losing his turn in favour of the swordsman who 'touched' him. In five minutes three were scratched, one on the wrist, one on the chin, another on the ear, by the defender of the step, who was himself unscathed.

On the landing there was no more fighting, but stories were told about women; and, in the antechamber, stories about the Court. On the landing D'Artagnan blushed, in the antechamber he shuddered. His lively and fickle imagination, which had rendered him formidable to chambermaids in Gascony, and sometimes to their young mistresses, had never dreamt, even in moments of delirium, of half the amorous wonders, or a quarter of the gallant adventures, which were seasoned by well-known names and not over-delicate details. But if his regard for morality was shocked on the landing, his respect for the Cardinal was shocked in the antechamber. There D'Artagnan, to his astonishment, heard the policy which made Europe tremble and the private life of the Cardinal criticized; this great man, so revered by M. d'Artagnan, was made the laughing-stock of the musketeers of M. de Tréville, who cracked jokes about his bandy legs and humpback.

However, now and then, when the King's name was pronounced, these scoffing mouths were closed for a moment, and doubts seemed to arise as to the thickness of the partition wall of M. de Tréville's room. Soon, however, an allusion brought back the conversation to his Eminence, and then the laughter was renewed.

"These fellows will all be sent to the Bastille, or be hung," thought D'Artagnan with terror; "and I, no doubt, along with them, as an accomplice. What would my father say, who recommended me so strongly to respect the Cardinal, if he knew that I was in the company of such heathens?"

As may be supposed, therefore, D'Artagnan did not dare to take part in the conversation, but contented himself with keeping his eyes and his ears wide open. As he was quite a stranger to the *entourage* of M. de Tréville, and had not been seen in the *hôtel* before, he was asked his business. D'Artagnan replied most humbly, and dwelling on his title of compatriot, begged the valet who had accosted him to ask M. de Tréville for a moment of audience. The valet, with an air of protection, promised to transmit his request in due time.

D'Artagnan, pretty well recovered from his first surprise, had

leisure now to look round him. In the centre of the most animated crowd was a tall musketeer with a haughty mien, whose strange costume attracted general attention. He did not wear the regulation cloak, which was not absolutely necessary in this period, when there was less liberty than independence; but a sky-blue doublet, rather faded and threadbare, and over this a magnificent baldrick, embroidered with gold. A long cloak of crimson velvet fell from his shoulders, revealing the front only of the baldrick, from which hung a gigantic rapier. This musketeer, who had just come off guard, complained of having caught cold, and coughed from time to time in an affected manner. This was the reason he gave for wearing his cloak and, while he spoke, twirling disdainfully his moustache; all admired his embroidered baldrick, and no one more than D'Artagnan.

"What would you have?" said the musketeer. "It is a piece of folly, I know; but it is the fashion. Besides, one must spend one's allowance on something."

"Ah, Porthos!" cried a comrade, "don't try to persuade us that your baldrick is due to paternal generosity; it was given to you by the veiled lady I met you with last Sunday at the Porte Saint-Honoré."

"No; on my honour and good faith as a gentleman, I bought it myself with my own money," replied Porthos.

"Yes, as I purchased," said another musketeer, "this new purse with what my mistress had put in the old one."

"I am telling the truth," said Porthos; "and the proof is that I paid twelve pistoles for it." The admiration redoubled, but the doubt continued to exist. "Didn't I, now, Aramis?" said Porthos, turning to another musketeer.

This other formed a most striking contrast with his companion. He was a young man of hardly twenty-two years of age, with a mild and simple face, a soft, dark eye, and cheeks rosy as a peach in autumn; his delicate moustache traced a correct line on his lip, he seemed afraid of lowering his hands lest the veins should be swollen, and he pinched the tips of his ears to make them keep their rosy colour. He usually spoke little and slowly, bowed frequently, and laughed without noise, showing his teeth, which were perfect, like the rest of his person. He replied to the appeal of his friend by nodding his head. This affirmation appeared to dispel all doubts with respect to the baldrick, and the conversation changed to another subject.

"M. de Tréville awaits M. d'Artagnan," interrupted the lackey, opening the door of the chamber.

At this announcement, while the door remained open, every one held his tongue ; and in the midst of a general silence the young Gascon crossed the antechamber and entered the apartment of the Captain of the Musketeers.

CHAPTER III

THE AUDIENCE

M. DE TRÉVILLE was in very bad humour ; however, he politely saluted the young man, who bowed to the very ground ; and he smiled on receiving his compliments, delivered in an accent which reminded him both of his youth and his country. But going to the door, and making a sign as if to ask D'Artagnan's permission to finish with the others before beginning with him, he called three times, raising his voice each time, " Athos ! Porthos ! Aramis ! "

The two musketeers whose acquaintance we have already made replied, and advanced toward the cabinet, the door of which they closed behind them.

When the two musketeers had entered, and when M. de Tréville had three or four times paced the floor in silence, and with knitted brow, passing each time in front of Porthos and Aramis, who stood motionless as if on parade, he stopped short, and looking at them with an air of irritation :

" Do you know what the King told me ? " he cried ; " and that no later than yesterday evening ; do you know, sirs ? "

" No," replied the musketeers, after a moment's silence ; " no, sir, we do not."

" But I hope you will do us the honour to inform us," added Aramis, in the most polite tone, and with a most graceful bow.

" He told me that he intended in future to recruit his musketeers from among the guards of the Cardinal."

" Among the guards of the Cardinal ! and why so ? " exclaimed Porthos.

" Because he sees that his *piquette* requires to be strengthened by being mixed with good wine."

The two musketeers flushed to the whites of their eyes. D'Artagnan felt most uncomfortable, and wished himself a hundred feet underground.

" Yes," continued M. de Tréville, growing more animated ; " and his Majesty is right, for on my honour, the musketeers cut

a sorry figure at Court. The Cardinal retorted while playing with the King yesterday, that these confounded musketeers, these devil-me-dares—and he spoke in an ironical manner which greatly enraged me—having rioted in the Rue Ferou in a wineshop—and I thought he was going to laugh in my face—his guards were obliged to arrest the disturbers: arrest musketeers! Zounds! you must know something of this, for you were among them. Don't defend yourselves; you were recognized; the Cardinal named you. This is all my fault for selecting such men. Come you, Aramis; why the devil did you ask for a uniform when you were about to don the cassock? And you, Porthos, is that fine gilded baldrick of yours meant only for a sword of straw? And Athos! I don't see Athos. Where is he?"

"Sir," replied Aramis sadly, "he is ill, very ill."

"Ill, very ill, you say. And what is his malady?"

"They fear the small-pox, sir," said Porthos, joining in the conversation; "and it would be a pity, for it would spoil his face."

"The small-pox! A nice story you tell me, Porthos—the small-pox at his age! No; but wounded, perhaps killed. Ah! don't tell me that! Zounds, gentlemen, I won't have you frequenting places of ill-fame, quarrelling in the streets, and drawing swords at cross-roads. I will not have you furnishing matter for laughter to the Cardinal's guards, who are worthy, quiet, and clever fellows, who never run the risk of being arrested, and who would never allow themselves to be arrested—I am sure of that. They would prefer to die rather than yield a single step. To run away, to take to your heels—that is good enough for the Musketeers of the King!"

Porthos and Aramis were quivering with rage; they would willingly have strangled M. de Tréville had they not been convinced that it was the love he bore them which prompted him to speak thus. They stamped on the carpet, bit their lips till they bled, and clenched the hilts of their swords. Outside, as we have said, the summons to Athos, Porthos, and Aramis had been plainly heard, and all had guessed by the tone of M. de Tréville's voice that he was in a towering passion.

"Ah! the King's Musketeers get arrested by the Guards of the Cardinal," continued M. de Tréville, as furious as his soldiers, jerking out his words and plunging them like so many stabs of a poniard into the hearts of his listeners. "Ah! six of the Cardinal's Guards arrest six of the King's Musketeers. *Morbleu!* I have taken a decision. I intend going to the Louvre at once. I shall throw up my commission as Captain of the King's

Musketeers, and ask to serve as a lieutenant in the Guards of his Eminence, and if I am refused I shall turn *abbé*."

" Well ! Captain," said Porthos, beside himself ; " the truth is that we were six to six, but we were attacked treacherously, and before we had time to draw our swords two of us were killed, and Athos was wounded so badly that he was hardly in better case. Twice he tried to get up, and twice he fell. However, we did not surrender ; no, we were carried off by force. On the road we got away. As for Athos, thinking he was dead, they left him on the field of battle ; that's the whole story. *Peste*, Captain, one cannot always win ! "

" I have the honour to inform you that I killed one of them with his own sword," said Aramis, " for mine was broken at the first pass."

" I did not know that," resumed M. de Tréville, somewhat appeased. " I see that the Cardinal exaggerated the victory."

" But for pity's sake, Captain," said Aramis, seeing that M. de Tréville was calming down, " do not say that Athos was wounded ; he would be driven to despair should the King hear of it, and as his wound is very serious, through the shoulder into the chest, there would be danger."

At this moment the tapestry was raised, and a noble, handsome head, but fearfully pale, appeared under the fringe.

" Athos ! " cried the two musketeers.

" Athos ! " repeated M. de Tréville.

" You summoned me, sir," said Athos to M. de Tréville in a feeble, but perfectly calm voice, " and I hastened to obey your orders. What do you desire, sir ? "

And at these words the musketeer, in irreproachable costume, entered the apartment with a firm step. M. de Tréville, much struck by this proof of courage, which touched his heart, sprang forward.

" I was just saying to these gentlemen," he added, " that I forbid my Musketeers to expose their lives without necessity ; for these gallant fellows are dear to the King, and the King knows that they are the bravest fellows in the world. Your hand, Athos."

And without allowing the newcomer time to reply, M. de Tréville seized his right hand and shook it with all his force. Athos, who had mustered up all his strength to struggle against the pain, conquered at last, fell on the floor as if dead.

" A surgeon ! " shouted M. de Tréville, " or my gallant Athos will die ! "

At the cry of M. de Tréville every one rushed into his cabinet and gathered round the wounded man. But this eagerness would have been of no avail had not the doctor been found in the *hôtel* itself; he pushed his way through the crowd, approached Athos, who was still in a faint, and as all this noise and bustle disturbed him, he asked that the musketeer should be carried into an adjoining room. M. de Tréville at once opened the door and showed the way to Porthos and Aramis, who carried their comrade off in their arms.

A moment afterward, Porthos and Aramis returned, leaving the surgeon and M. de Tréville alone with the wounded man.

M. de Tréville at length returned. The wounded man had come to himself; the surgeon declared that the state of the musketeer inspired no alarm, and that his weakness was simply caused by loss of blood.

Then M. de Tréville made a sign with his hand, and every one withdrew, with the exception of D'Artagnan, who did not forget that he had an audience, and who, with his Gascon tenacity, remained. When every one had left, and the door was closed, M. de Tréville turned round and found himself alone with the young man. What had just happened had made him somewhat lose the thread of his ideas. He asked this obstinate petitioner what he wanted. D'Artagnan mentioned his name, and M. de Tréville then remembered him.

"Pardon me," he said, smiling; "I had quite forgotten you, my dear compatriot. What do you desire? A captain is only a *paterfamilias* with a wider responsibility than an ordinary father. Soldiers are big children; but as I am determined that the orders of the King, and above all, those of the Cardinal, shall be executed . . ."

D'Artagnan could not refrain from smiling. By this smile M. de Tréville guessed that he had no fool to deal with, and, coming to the point, said:

"I liked your father greatly. What can I do for his son? Make haste: my time is not my own."

"Sir," said D'Artagnan, "on leaving Tarbes, I proposed to ask, in remembrance of this friendship, for the uniform of a musketeer; but from what I have seen during the last two hours, I understand that such a favour would be enormous, and I tremble lest I should not deserve it."

"It is a favour, indeed, young man," replied M. de Tréville; "but still it is not so far beyond your hopes as you appear to

think. However, a decision of his Majesty has foreseen your case, and I regret to announce that no one can be received as a musketeer without first going through some campaigns, or performing some brilliant deed of arms, or at least serving for two years in some regiment less favoured than ours."

D'Artagnan bowed without replying. He felt more anxious than ever to don the uniform of a musketeer now that he was aware of the difficulties which stood in the way.

" But," added M. de Tréville, throwing a piercing look at his compatriot, as if he would read the bottom of his heart, " in consideration for your father, my old comrade, I am willing to do something for you. Our younger sons in Béarn are not usually rich ; and, I presume, matters have not changed since I left the province ? With the money you have brought with you, you cannot have too much to live on."

D'Artagnan drew himself up with a proud air which suggested that he asked alms of no one.

" Very good, young man, very good," continued Tréville ; " I know those airs. I came to Paris with four crowns in my pocket, and I should have fought with anyone who said I could not purchase the Louvre."

D'Artagnan drew himself up more and more ; thanks to the sale of his horse, he began his career with four crowns more than M. de Tréville had done.

" You must, then, I was saying, be anxious to keep what you have, no matter how large the sum ; but you must also require to improve yourself in those exercises suited to a gentleman. I will write to-day to the director of the Royal Academy, and he will receive you without payment. You will learn riding, fencing, and dancing ; you will make good acquaintances, and you will come and see me from time to time to say how you are progressing and what I can do for you."

D'Artagnan, although a stranger to Court manners, could not but perceive the coldness of this reception.

" Alas, sir," he said, " I see how grievously I lack the letter of recommendation which my father handed to me for you. But I was basely robbed of it ! "

And he related the whole scene at Meung, giving a minute description of the unknown gentleman, with an ardour and sincerity which charmed M. de Tréville.

" This is strange," said the latter, after meditating a little. " You had, then, mentioned my name aloud ? "

" Yes, sir, I no doubt committed that imprudence. And why

not ?—a name like yours could not but serve as a protection by the way, and I often availed myself of it."

Flattery was much in fashion then, and M. de Tréville loved incense like a king or a cardinal. He could not help smiling with visible satisfaction, but this smile soon vanished, and, returning to the adventure at Meung :

" Tell me," he said, " had this gentleman a slight scar on the cheek ? "

" Yes ; as if it had been grazed by a bullet."

" Was he not a fine-looking man ? "

" Yes."

" Tall ? "

" Yes."

" Pale complexion and dark hair ? "

" Yes, that's it. How comes it, sir, that you know this man ? Ah ! if I ever come across him again, I swear that were it in hell——"

" He awaited a woman ? "

" At least, he left after having spoken with one."

" Do you know what was the subject of their conversation ? "

" He handed her a box, which he said contained her instructions, and told her to open it only in London."

" Was this woman English ? "

" He called her Milady."

" It is he," murmured De Tréville, " it is he ! I thought he was still at Brussels."

" Oh, sir, if you know who this man is," cried D'Artagnan, " point out who and where he is, and I will release you from all your promises, even that of procuring my admission into the Musketeers, for before everything else I must have revenge."

" By no means, young man," cried De Tréville ; " on the contrary, if you see him on one side of the street cross over to the other. Do not run upon such a rock ; it would break you like glass."

" That will not prevent me," said D'Artagnan ; " if ever I find him——"

" In the meantime," returned M. de Tréville, " if you will be advised you will not look for him."

Suddenly De Tréville stopped, struck by a suspicion. The great hatred manifested by this young man for the traveller who —a thing rather improbable—had stolen the letter of his father, did it not conceal some perfidy ? Was not this youth sent by his Eminence ? He eyed D'Artagnan even more fixedly. He was

not much reassured by the aspect of his face, which sparkled with shrewd wit and affected humility.

" I know that he is a Gascon," thought he, " but he may be so as much for the Cardinal as for myself. Let us put him to the test. My friend," he said slowly, " I desire, in order to repair the coldness which you at first remarked in my reception, to reveal to you the secrets of our policy. The King and the Cardinal are the best of friends ; their apparent disputes are merely to deceive fools. I do not wish that a compatriot, a good horseman and gallant lad, made to get on, should fall into the snares which have ruined so many persons. Now, young man, if through your family, your relations, or your own instinct, you bear the Cardinal any enmity, say good-bye and let us part."

De Tréville said to himself : " If the Cardinal has sent me this young fox he will certainly not have failed, knowing how I hate him, to tell his spy that the best way to get on with me will be to speak ill of him ; therefore, in spite of my protestations, the cunning accomplice will no doubt declare that he holds his Eminence in horror."

It turned out quite different from what Tréville expected, for D'Artagnan replied with the greatest simplicity : " Sir, I came to Paris with similar intentions. My father told me to suffer nothing but from the King, the Cardinal, and yourself, whom he holds for the first three gentlemen of France."

D'Artagnan added M. de Tréville to the two others, as the reader will have noted, thinking that this addition would do no harm.

" I have, therefore, a great veneration for the Cardinal," he went on to say, " and the deepest respect for all his acts. So much the better for me, sir, if, as you say, you speak frankly, for then you will do me the honour to esteem this resemblance in our tastes."

M. de Tréville was greatly surprised. So much penetration, and so much openness, excited his admiration, but did not entirely remove his doubts ; the more D'Artagnan was superior to other young men, the more he dreaded being deceived. Nevertheless, he shook him by the hand.

" You are an honest lad, but at this moment I can do no more for you than what I offered. My *hôtel* will be always open to you."

" That is to say, sir, that I must wait until I have rendered myself worthy," replied D'Artagnan. " Never fear," he added, with his Gascon familiarity, " you will not have to wait long." He bowed and turned to go.

"Wait a minute," said M. de Tréville; "I promised you a letter for the director of the Academy. Are you too proud to accept it, my young gentleman?"

"No, sir," said D'Artagnan; "and I answer for it that it shall not share the same fate as the other. I will protect it so well that I swear it shall reach its address; and woe to him who tries to take it from me!"

M. de Tréville smiled at this fanfaronade, and seating himself at a table, he began to write the promised latter. During this time, D'Artagnan had nothing better to do than to beat a march on the window-panes, while looking at the musketeers who passed by.

M. de Tréville having written the letter, sealed it, and rising, approached the young man to hand it to him. But at the moment D'Artagnan stretched out his hand, M. de Tréville was much surprised to see him start, grow red with rage, and dash out of the room, crying:

"Zounds! he shall not escape me this time!"

"Who?" asked M. de Tréville.

"He! my thief!" replied D'Artagnan. "Ah! the traitor!" and he disappeared.

"What a devil of a madman!" murmured M. de Tréville. "Unless," added he, "this is a skilful mode of escape on seeing that he has failed in his purpose."

CHAPTER IV

THE SHOULDER OF ATHOS, THE BALDRICK OF PORTHOS, AND THE POCKET-HANDKERCHIEF OF ARAMIS

D'ARTAGNAN, infuriated, had crossed the antechamber at three bounds, and was dashing down the stairs four steps at a time, when he ran head first into a musketeer, striking him right on his shoulder, and making him utter a cry, or rather a howl.

"Excuse me," said D'Artagnan, endeavouring to resume his course, "but I am in a hurry."

Hardly had he descended the first flight when an iron hand seized him by his scarf and stopped him.

"You are in a hurry!" exclaimed the musketeer, pale as a winding-sheet; "on this pretext you run up against me; you say 'Excuse me,' and think that sufficient; you think that

because you heard M. de Tréville speak rather cavalierly to us to-day that you can treat us as he spoke to us ? "

" Faith ! " replied D'Artagnan, recognizing Athos, who, after having his wound dressed by the doctor, was returning to his quarters ; " I did not do it on purpose, and not having done it on purpose, I said, ' Excuse me.' On my word of honour, I am in a great hurry, and I therefore beg you to let me go."

" Sir," replied Athos, " you are not polite, and one sees that you come from some outlandish place."

D'Artagnan had already jumped down several steps, but the observation of Athos stopped him short.

" *Morbleu*, sir ! " said he, " wherever I come from, it isn't you who will teach me manners. Let me warn you."

" Perhaps I shall," said Athos.

" Ah ! if I were not in such a hurry, and running after some one——"

" Mister Gentleman-in-a-hurry, you will find me without running after me. Do you hear ? "

" And where, if you please ? "

" Near the Carmes-Déchaux."

" At what hour ? "

" About noon."

" About noon ; all right, I shall be there."

" Try not to keep me waiting, for at a quarter past noon I shall cut off your ears."

" Good ! " cried D'Artagnan ; " I shall be there at ten minutes to twelve." And he ran off as if the devil were after him, hoping still to find the stranger, who could not be far off.

But at the street door Porthos was talking with a soldier. Between the two there was just room for a man. D'Artagnan thought that he could pass between them like an arrow. But he had reckoned without the wind, which blew out the long cloak of Porthos, into which D'Artagnan plunged. No doubt Porthos had good reasons for not abandoning this essential portion of his costume, for instead of letting go the flap which he held, he drew it toward him, and the consequence was that D'Artagnan rolled himself up in the velvet by a movement of rotation, explained by the obstinate resistance of Porthos.

D'Artagnan, hearing the musketeer swear, tried to escape from under the cloak, which blinded him, and endeavoured to make his way out of its folds. He feared he had damaged the magnificent baldrick, with which we are already acquainted. But, on opening his eyes he found his nose between the two shoulders of

Porthos; that is to say, exactly on the baldrick. Alas! like many things in this world which have only appearances in their favour, the baldrick, which was of gold before, was nothing but buff behind. Porthos, vainglorious as he was, not being able to have a baldrick entirely ornamented with gold, had half a one: the necessity of having a cold, and of wearing a cloak, now became patent.

"*Ventrebleu!*" cried Porthos, endeavouring to shake off D'Artagnan, who was wriggling in his back, "are you mad, to run up against people thus?"

"Excuse me," said D'Artagnan, reappearing under the shoulder of the giant, "but I am in a great hurry. I am running after some one——"

"Do you forget your eyes when you run?" asked Porthos.

"No," replied D'Artagnan, nettled; "no; and, thanks to my eyes, I see what others do not."

Porthos may or may not have understood, but getting into a passion:

"Sir," he said, "you will have your hide tanned if you thus rub up against musketeers."

"'Tanned,' sir. The word is somewhat harsh."

"It is the word which suits a man accustomed to look his enemies in the face."

"*Pardieu!* I know you don't turn your back to them." And the young man, enchanted with his joke, made off, roaring with laughter.

Porthos, foaming with rage, made as if to rush upon D'Artagnan, who cried:

"Later on! later on, when you have taken off your cloak."

"At one o'clock, then, behind the Luxembourg."

"Very well, at one o'clock," replied D'Artagnan, turning the corner of the street.

Neither in this street nor the next could he see anyone. Perhaps the stranger had entered a house. D'Artagnan made inquiries of every one he met, but learned absolutely nothing. However, his walk did him good, for while his forehead was bathed with perspiration, his blood had cooled.

He began to reflect on the events which had occurred. They were numerous and inauspicious. It was hardly eleven in the morning, and already he had incurred the displeasure of M. de Tréville, who could not fail to resent his unceremonious departure. Then he had picked up two duels with men each capable of killing three D'Artagnans—with two musketeers, in short;

that is to say, with two of the beings he esteemed so highly, and whom he placed in his heart above all other men.

The prospect was melancholy. Sure to be killed by Athos, one can understand that the young man dwelled little upon Porthos. Yet, as hope is the last thing extinguished in the human breast, he began to hope that he might survive these two duels, with some terrible wounds, of course; and on the chance of surviving he began to look toward the future.

D'Artagnan, while walking and soliloquizing, had arrived close to the Hôtel d'Aiguillon, before which he perceived Aramis talking gaily with three gentlemen of the King's Guard. Aramis also noticed D'Artagnan; but, as he did not forget that it was before this young man that M. de Tréville had been so angry, and as a witness of the reproaches addressed to the musketeers was in no wise agreeable to him, he pretended not to see him. D'Artagnan, however, full of his plans for conciliation and courtesy, approached the four young men, and accompanied a low bow with a gracious smile. Aramis bent his head slightly, but did not smile. All four, however, immediately stopped their conversation.

D'Artagnan was not so dull as not to perceive that his presence was undesired, but he had not a sufficient knowledge of the world to retire gracefully from a false situation. He was searching for some means for beating a retreat with the least awkwardness possible when he remarked that Aramis had let fall his pocket-handkerchief, and that no doubt by accident he had placed his foot upon it. The moment appeared to him propitious for repairing his fault; he stooped down, and with the most gracious air drew the handkerchief from under the foot of the musketeer, in spite of the efforts of the other to keep it there, and handing it to him, said:

"I believe, sir, that this is a handkerchief you would regret to lose."

The handkerchief, in fact, was richly embroidered, and had a coronet and a coat-of-arms in the corner. Aramis blushed deeply, and snatched rather than took the handkerchief from the Gascon.

"Ah! ah!" cried one of the guards, "will you still declare, discreet Aramis, that you are not on good terms with Madame de Bois-Tracy, when that lady is so obliging as to lend you her handkerchiefs?"

Aramis darted at D'Artagnan one of those looks which give a man to understand that he has made a mortal enemy; then reassuming his honeyed air:

" You are mistaken, gentlemen," he said ; " this handkerchief is not mine, and I do not know why this gentleman should have taken it into his head to hand it to me rather than to one of you ; and the proof of what I say is that here is my handkerchief in my pocket."

At these words he drew his own handkerchief, which was also of fine cambric, but without embroidery or arms, and adorned only with the initials of its owner.

This time, D'Artagnan, who had recognized his mistake, held his peace ; but the friends of Aramis did not allow themselves to be convinced by his denials, and one of them, addressing the young musketeer with mock solemnity, said :

" If it is as you pretend, my dear Aramis, I shall be obliged to ask you to hand it to me, for, as you are aware, Bois-Tracy is one of my intimate friends, and I don't wish an article belonging to his wife to be made a trophy of."

" You make your demand badly," replied Aramis, " and while recognizing the justice of your claim as regards its grounds, I refuse on account of the form."

" The fact is," timidly ventured D'Artagnan, " that I did not see M. Aramis draw the handkerchief from his pocket. He had his foot upon it, and that is all, and I therefore thought it belonged to him."

" And you were mistaken, my dear sir," coldly answered Aramis, little mollified by this reparation ; then turning to the guardsman who had declared himself the friend of Bois-Tracy, he said :

" As we are both friends of Bois-Tracy, the handkerchief may just as well have come from your pocket as from mine."

" No, on my honour ! " cried the King's Guard.

" You shall swear on your honour, and I on my word, and then clearly one of us will have lied. Let us do better, Montran ; let us each take half."

" Of the handkerchief ? "

" Yes."

" Perfect ! " cried the other guards ; " the judgment of Solomon."

The young men roared with laughter, and of course the affair went no further. After awhile the conversation ceased, and the three guards and the musketeer, after shaking each other cordially by the hand, separated. D'Artagnan thought this a good time to make his peace with a gallant fellow, and approaching Aramis, he said :

"Sir, I trust you will forgive me."

"Ah! sir," interrupted Aramis, "permit me to observe that you did not act like a gentleman in this matter."

"What, sir?" cried D'Artagnan; "you suppose——"

"I suppose, sir, that you are a dolt, and that you know very well, although just arrived from Gascony, that one does not tread for nothing upon pocket-handkerchiefs. The devil take it! but Paris is not paved with cambric."

"Sir, you are wrong to try and humiliate me," said D'Artagnan, whose quarrelsome nature began to show itself in spite of his pacific resolutions. "I am a Gascon, it is true, and I need hardly tell you that the Gascons are not very patient; when they have apologized once, they consider they have done half as much again as could be expected of them."

"Sir, what I say," replied Aramis, "is not to seek a quarrel. Thank God, I am no swash-buckler, and being a musketeer only for a time, I never fight unless forced, and always with great repugnance; but this time the affair is serious, for here is a lady compromised by you."

"By us, you mean," cried D'Artagnan.

"Why were you so injudicious as to give me the handkerchief?"

"Why were you injudicious enough to let it fall?"

"I have said, and I repeat, sir, that this handkerchief did not come out of my pocket."

"Well, sir, you have lied twice, for I saw it come out."

"Ah! if you take it in that tone, Master Gascon, I shall teach you manners."

"And I shall send you to your mass, Master Abbé. Draw at once, if you please."

"No, my fine friend; at least not here. Do you not see that we are in front of the Hôtel d'Aiguillon, which is full of the creatures of the Cardinal? How do I know that it is not his Eminence who has told you to procure him my head? Now, I have a ridiculous weakness for my head, which I think suits my shoulders very well. Don't be uneasy; I intend to kill you, but to kill you quietly, in an enclosed place, where you will not be able to boast of your death to anyone."

"Very well, but don't be too sure, and take your handkerchief with you, whether it belongs to you or not; you may require it."

"You are a Gascon, sir?" inquired Aramis.

"Yes; you do not wish to put off the rendezvous for reasons of prudence, sir?"

"Prudence, sir, is a virtue not in use among musketeers, I know, but indispensable to Churchmen, and as I am a musketeer for the time being only, I desire to remain prudent. At two o'clock I shall have the honour to expect you at the *hôtel* of M. de Tréville. There I will point out a good place."

The two young men bowed, Aramis ascending the street leading to the Luxembourg, while D'Artagnan, seeing that time was getting on, took the road to the Carmes-Déchaux, saying to himself: "Decidedly, I am done for, but if I am killed it will be by a musketeer."

CHAPTER V

THE KING'S MUSKETEERS AND THE CARDINAL'S GUARDS

D'ARTAGNAN knew no one in Paris. He therefore went to the rendezvous with Athos without a second, resolved to accept those chosen by his adversary. Besides, his intention was to make suitable apologies to the brave musketeer, though without showing weakness, for he feared the result of a duel between a vigorous young man and an adversary wounded and enfeebled; vanquished, he would enhance the triumph of his adversary; victor, he would be accused of showing courage where there was little risk.

When D'Artagnan came in sight of this uncultivated patch at the foot of the monastery, Athos had been waiting for five minutes only, and noon was striking. He was therefore punctual.

Athos, who was still suffering acutely from his wound, although it had been dressed afresh by the doctor, was seated on a fendstone, and awaited his adversary with that placid and dignified air which never left him. At the sight of D'Artagnan he rose politely and took some steps toward him. For his part, D'Artagnan approached his adversary hat in hand.

"Sir," said Athos, "I have sent word to two of my friends who will act as seconds; but they have not yet arrived. I am astonished that they are late, for it is not their custom."

"I myself, sir, have no seconds," said D'Artagnan; "for having arrived but yesterday in Paris, I know no one but M. de Tréville, to whom I was recommended by my father."

Athos reflected an instant.

"You know only M. de Tréville?"

"Yes, sir, I know him alone."

" But," continued Athos, speaking half to himself and half to D'Artagnan, " if I kill you, I shall be taken for a slayer of children ! "

" Hardly so, sir," replied D'Artagnan, with a bow not wanting in dignity ; " since you do me the honour to cross swords with me while suffering from a wound which must greatly inconvenience you."

" Very much so, on my word ; and I must say that you hurt me like the devil ; but I shall take my left hand, as I usually do under such circumstances. You must not suppose that I offer you an advantage, for I can fight with both hands ; the disadvantage will be for you ; a left-handed man is very awkward for an opponent who is not used to one. I regret not to have informed you of this circumstance sooner."

" I am most grateful for your courtesy," said D'Artagnan, bowing again.

" You overwhelm me," said Athos, in his well-bred manner ; " let us talk of something else, I beg you. Ah, how you have hurt me ! My shoulder is on fire."

" If you would permit me——" said D'Artagnan, timidly.

" What, sir ? "

" I have a miraculous balm for wounds, given to me by my mother, and which I have tried on myself."

" Well ? "

" Well, I am sure that this balm would cure you in less than three days ; and when you were cured it would still be a great honour for me to be your man."

D'Artagnan spoke these words with a simplicity which did credit to his courtesy, without in any way detracting from his courage.

" *Pardieu !* " said Athos, " I like your offer, not that I accept it, but it betokens a gentleman. It was thus that the knights spoke in the time of Charlemagne. Unfortunately, we do not live in the days of the great Emperor, but in those of the Cardinal. No matter how well-kept our secret, it would become known that we were going to fight in three days. But what has become of these loiterers ? "

" If you are in a hurry," said D'Artagnan, " and desire to start me off at once, I beg you will not stand upon ceremony."

" Another speech which pleases me," replied Athos, bowing gracefully to D'Artagnan ; " I like men of your temperament ; and I see that if we do not kill each other, I shall greatly enjoy your conversation. Let us wait for these gentlemen, I beg you ;

I have plenty of time, and it will be more correct to do so. Ah, here is one of them." The burly form of Porthos just then came into view at the end of the Rue de Vaugirard.

"What!" cried D'Artagnan, "your first second is M. Porthos?"

"Yes; have you any objection?"

"No, not at all."

"And here is the other."

D'Artagnan turned in the direction indicated by Athos, and recognized Aramis.

"What!" he cried, more astonished than before, "your other second is M. Aramis?"

"That is so; are you not aware that we are never seen one without the other, and that among the musketeers and the guards, at Court and about the town, we are called Athos, Porthos and Aramis, or the 'three inseparables'? But, of course, as you have just landed from Dax or Pau——"

"From Tarbes," said D'Artagnan.

"You are not obliged to know this detail."

"*Ma foi!*" said D'Artagnan, "you are well named."

Meanwhile, Porthos had drawn near and saluted Athos with his hand; then, turning toward D'Artagnan, had shown astonishment. Be it mentioned that he had changed his baldrick and taken off his cloak.

"Ah, ah!" he ejaculated, "what have we here?"

"It is with this gentleman that I am going to fight," said Athos, pointing to D'Artagnan.

"It is with him that I am going to fight also," said Porthos.

"And I, too," said Aramis, arriving in his turn on the ground.

"But not before two o'clock," said D'Artagnan calmly.

"But what are you going to fight about, Athos?" asked Aramis.

"Indeed, I hardly know, but he hurt my shoulder; and you, Porthos?"

"Well, I fight because I fight," said Porthos, flushing.

Athos, who observed everything, saw a malicious smile on the lips of the Gascon.

"We had a discussion on the subject of dress," said the young man.

"And you, Aramis?" asked Athos.

"I am going to fight over a question of theology," replied Aramis, making a sign to D'Artagnan to keep the cause of the duel secret.

Again Athos caught a smile on the lips of D'Artagnan.

"Decidedly, he is a man of wit," murmured Athos.

"And now that you are assembled, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "permit me to offer my apologies."

At this word, "apologies," a cloud passed over the brow of Athos, a haughty smile touched the lips of Porthos, while Aramis made a negative sign.

"You do not understand me, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, raising his head, upon which a gleam of sunshine played just then, gilding the delicate yet masculine lines of his face; "I apologize in the event of not being able to pay my debt to all three, for M. Athos has the right to kill me first, which deprives your debt of a good deal of its value, M. Porthos, and which renders yours almost null, M. Aramis. And now, gentlemen, I repeat, forgive me, but for that only, and so, on guard!"

At these words D'Artagnan drew his rapier with the finest air possible. The blood rushed to his head, and at that moment he would have fought all the musketeers in the kingdom.

"When you are ready, sir," said Athos, putting himself on guard.

"I am at your service," said D'Artagnan, crossing swords.

But the two rapiers had hardly touched when a detachment of the Guards of his Eminence appeared at the corner of the convent, commanded by M. de Jussac.

"The Guards of the Cardinal!" cried Porthos and Aramis; "sheath your swords, gentlemen—sheath your swords."

But it was too late—the two combatants had been seen in an attitude which permitted no doubt as to their intentions.

"Ho there!" cried Jussac, advancing toward them, and making a sign to his men to follow him; "what, musketeers fighting? And what becomes of the edicts?"

"You are very generous, gentlemen of the Guard," said Athos, full of rancour, for Jussac had been one of the aggressors two days before. "If we saw you fight, I can answer for it that we should not hinder you; so allow us to continue, and you will have some pleasure without any trouble."

"Gentlemen," said Jussac, "it is with great regret that I declare the thing impossible—our duty before everything. Be pleased, then, to sheath your swords and to follow us."

"Sir," said Aramis, parodying Jussac, "we would accept your kind invitation with the greatest pleasure if it depended upon us, but, unfortunately, the thing is impossible—M. de Tréville has forbidden us. So pass on."

This raillery exasperated Jussac.

"We shall attack you," he said, "if you disobey."

"They are five," said Athos, "and we are three; we shall be beaten again, and shall have to die here, for I declare that I shall not reappear defeated before the Captain."

Athos, Porthos, and Aramis immediately drew together, while Jussac drew up his men. A single instant sufficed for D'Artagnan to make up his mind. This was one of those events which decide a man's future: he had to choose between the King and the Cardinal. And having made his choice, he must persevere in it. To fight meant to disobey the law, to risk his head, to make once for all an enemy of a minister more powerful than the King himself. The young man realized all this and, be it said to his credit, did not hesitate for a second. Turning toward Athos and his friends, he said:

"Gentlemen, allow me to contradict you when you say that you are but three; it appears to me that we are four."

"But you are not one of us," said Porthos.

"That is true," replied D'Artagnan; "but though I haven't the uniform, I have the spirit. I am a musketeer at heart."

"Withdraw, young man," said Jussac, who doubtless guessed D'Artagnan's design; "we will allow you to retire and save your skin."

D'Artagnan did not stir.

"Decidedly you are a capital fellow," said Athos, clasping his hand.

"Come—come, make up your minds!" cried Jussac.

"Well," said Porthos and Aramis, "let us do something."

"What is your name, my brave fellow?" said Athos.

"D'Artagnan, sir."

"Well, Athos, Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan, forward!" cried Athos.

And the nine combatants fell upon each other with a fury which was not devoid of method.

Athos engaged a certain Cahusac, a favourite of the Cardinal; Porthos engaged Bicarat; while Aramis saw himself faced with two adversaries; as for D'Artagnan, he found himself matched against Jussac himself. The heart of the young Gascon was beating as though it would burst, not with fear—he felt not a shadow of that—but with emulation; he fought like an enraged tiger, turning round his adversary, and constantly changing his ground. Jussac, as the saying went, was an epicure of the sword, and had practised much; however, he had all the trouble in the world to

defend himself against so agile and leaping an adversary, who set ordinary rules at defiance. This struggle ended by making Jussac impatient. Angry at being held in check by an adversary he looked upon as a boy, he became excited, and began to commit faults. D'Artagnan, who, in default of practice, had excellent theory, redoubled his agility. Jussac, wishing to terminate the affair, made a terrible lunge at his adversary, who parried the thrust, and, as Jussac was recovering himself, gliding like a serpent under his blade, ran his rapier through his body. Jussac fell all of a heap. D'Artagnan then threw an uneasy and rapid glance over the field of battle.

Aramis had already killed one of his adversaries ; but the other was pressing him keenly. However, Aramis was not in difficulties, and could still defend himself.

Porthos had just received a wound through the arm, and had run Bicarat through the thigh. But neither wound was serious. Athos, wounded again by Cahusac, was growing rapidly paler, but did not yield an inch ; only he had changed his sword to his left hand.

D'Artagnan, according to the laws of duelling at that period, was at liberty to help a friend. While looking to see which of his companions he should aid, he caught a glance from Athos. Athos would sooner have died than have called for help, but his eyes seemed to ask for support. D'Artagnan comprehended this, and sprang with a terrible bound on the flank of Cahusac, shouting :

" My turn, sir ; I mean to kill you ! "

Cahusac turned round ; it was high time, for Athos, sustained only by his supreme courage, fell upon his knee.

" *Sangdieu !* " cried he to D'Artagnan, " do not kill him, young man ; I have an old affair to settle with him when I am cured and well. Disarm him only. That's right ! "

This exclamation sprang from Athos on seeing the sword of Cahusac dashed twenty paces from him. D'Artagnan and Cahusac both darted after it, but D'Artagnan being the quicker, arrived first, and placed his foot upon it.

Cahusac then ran to the guard who had been killed, seized on his rapier, and was returning to D'Artagnan ; but he met Athos on the way, who had recovered breath, and who, fearing that D'Artagnan would slay his enemy, wished to recommence the combat.

D'Artagnan understood that Athos wished to be left alone. In fact, a few seconds afterward Cahusac fell, run through the throat. At the same moment Aramis held his sword to the chest

of his adversary, who was on the ground, and forced him to ask for mercy.

There remained Porthos and Bicarat. Porthos was indulging in a thousand fanfaronades, asking Bicarat what time it might be, and complimenting him on the company which his brother had just received in the regiment of Navarre ; but while joking he gained no advantage. Bicarat was one of those men of iron who fall only when dead.

However, it was necessary to finish. The watch might arrive and arrest all the combatants, Royalists and Cardinalists. Athos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan surrounded Bicarat, and summoned him to surrender. Bicarat, although wounded, wished to continue the fight against them all ; but Jussac, who had raised himself on his elbow, called to him to surrender. Bicarat was a Gascon, like D'Artagnan ; he turned a deaf ear, and finding time between two attacks to trace out a piece of ground with the point of his sword, said, parodying a text in the Bible :

" Here will Bicarat die alone of those who are with him."

" But there are four against you ; leave off, I order you ! "

" Ah ! if you order it, that is another thing," said Bicarat ; " you being my leader, I must obey." And springing backward, he broke his sword across his knee, and to avoid having to surrender it, flung the pieces over the convent wall, then folded his arms, and began to whistle a Cardinalist air.

Bravery is always respected, even in an enemy. The musketeers saluted Bicarat and sheathed their swords. D'Artagnan did the same, and then, aided by Bicarat, they carried Jussac, Cahusac, and that adversary of Aramis who was merely wounded, under the porch of the convent. The fourth man, as we have said, was dead. They then rang the bell, and carrying off four swords out of five, intoxicated with delight, took the road to the *hôtel* of M. de Tréville.

Thus they went, arm-in-arm, taking up the whole breadth of the street, accosting every musketeer they met, until in the end their progress became a triumphal march. The heart of D'Artagnan was intoxicated with delight ; he marched between Athos and Porthos, pressing them tenderly.

" If I am not yet a musketeer," he said to his new friends on crossing the gate of the *hôtel* of M. de Tréville, " at least I have been received as an apprentice, have I not ? "

CHAPTER VI

HIS MAJESTY LOUIS THE THIRTEENTH

THIS affair made a great noise. M. de Tréville scolded his musketeers loudly in public, and congratulated them in private. But as there was no time to be lost in warning the King, he set out at once for the Louvre. He was already too late : the Cardinal was closeted with his Majesty, and M. de Tréville was told that the King was engaged and could not receive him for the moment. In the evening M. de Tréville came to see the King play. His Majesty was winning, and as he was very avaricious, he was in excellent humour ; so, as soon as he saw De Tréville :

" Come here, Captain," he said ; " come that I may scold you. You know that his Eminence has been here to complain of your musketeers, and that with so much emotion that he is quite ill. Why ! they are regular demons, scamps to be strung up, your musketeers."

" No, Sire," replied De Tréville, who saw at the first glance how matters were going to turn out. " On the contrary, they are harmless creatures, and gentle as lambs, with only one desire : their swords are never drawn except in the service of your Majesty. But the guards of the Cardinal are continually picking quarrels with them, and for the honour of the corps the poor fellows are obliged to defend themselves."

" Listen to M. de Tréville," said the King ; " would not one suppose him to be talking of a religious community ! Of a truth, Captain, I feel inclined to deprive you of your commission and to give it to Mademoiselle de Chemerault, to whom I have promised an abbey ; you must not think that I am going to accept your word. I am called Louis the Just, and we shall see about it presently."

" It is because I have confidence in this justice, Sire, that I shall await the decision of your Majesty without anxiety."

" Wait then, sir," said the King ; " you will not be kept waiting long."

The King's luck was changing, and as he was beginning to lose what he had won, he was not sorry for a pretext to *faire Charlemagne*.[1] His Majesty rose, pocketing the money which was before him, most of which consisted of his winnings.

" La Vieuville," he said, " take my place ; I must speak to

[1] Not give a loser his revenge.—TRANSLATOR.

M. de Tréville on an important affair. Ah! I had eighty louis before me; put down the same sum, so that those who have lost may have nothing to complain of. Justice before everything."

Then, turning to M. de Tréville, and taking him into the embrasure of a window: "Well, sir, you say that the guards of his Eminence picked a quarrel with your musketeers?"

"Yes, Sire, as they always do."

"And how did the affair happen? for you know, my dear Captain, that a judge must hear both sides."

"In the most simple manner possible. Three of my best soldiers, who are known to your Majesty by name, were making holiday with a young cadet from Gascony, whom I had recommended to them in the morning, and they had a rendezvous at the Carmes-Déchaux, when they were disturbed by M. de Jussac, and MM. Cahusac, Bicarat, and two other guards, who were certainly not there in such force without intending to infringe the edicts."

"Ah! ah! now I come to think of it," said the King, "no doubt they themselves were coming to fight."

"I do not accuse them, Sire; I leave it to your Majesty to appreciate what five armed men were going to do in that deserted spot."

"You are right, Tréville, you are right."

"Then, when they saw my musketeers, they changed their intention and forgot their personal hatred; for your Majesty is aware that the musketeers, who belong to the King, and to the King alone, are the natural enemies of the guards, who belong to the Cardinal."

"Yes," said the King in a melancholy voice, "it is sad to think that there are two parties in France, and two heads; but this must soon finish. You say that the guards picked a quarrel with the musketeers?"

"I say this is probable, but I will swear to nothing, Sire; you know how difficult it is to ascertain the truth unless one is endowed with that admirable instinct which has caused Louis XIII to be named the Just."

"You are right; but your musketeers were not alone; there was a lad with them."

"Yes, Sire, and one man was wounded, so that three of the King's Musketeers, one of whom was wounded, and a lad, not only held their own against five of the most terrible guards of the Cardinal, but brought four of them to the ground."

"But this is a victory," cried the King joyfully, "a complete victory!"

" Yes, Sire, as complete as that of the bridge of Cé."

" Four men, of whom one was wounded, and one a mere lad, say you ? "

" No more than a youth ; but who behaved so well on this occasion, that I take the liberty of recommending him to your Majesty."

" What is his name ? "

" D'Artagnan, Sire. He is the son of one of my oldest friends, who served the King, your father, of glorious memory, in the civil war."

" And he behaved himself well ? Tell me about this. You know that I like tales of wars and combats."

And the King twirled his moustache proudly.

" As I said, Sire, M. d'Artagnan is almost a child, and as he does not belong to the Musketeers, he was in civil garb. The guards of the Cardinal, remarking his youth, and that he did not belong to the corps, asked him to retire before they attacked."

" You see," interrupted the King, " that it was they who attacked."

" That is correct, Sire ; they called upon him to withdraw, but he replied that at heart he was a musketeer of the King, and that he would remain with the musketeers."

" Gallant young man ! " murmured the King.

" In fact, he remained with them, and in him your Majesty has a stout champion, for he it was who gave De Jussac that terrible thrust which has so irritated the Cardinal."

" It was he who wounded Jussac ? " cried the King ; " a lad ! that is quite impossible."

" It is as I have the honour to tell your Majesty."

" Jussac is one of the first blades of the kingdom."

" Well, Sire, he has found his master."

" I should like to see this young man, Tréville, and we will see if we can do something for him."

" When will your Majesty condescend to receive him ? "

" To-morrow at eight o'clock, Tréville."

" Shall I bring him alone ? "

" No, bring all four together ; devoted men are so rare that they ought to be rewarded."

" At eight o'clock, Sire, we shall be at the Louvre."

" Ah ! by the private stair, Tréville ; the Cardinal need not know."

" Yes, Sire."

"You understand, Tréville, an edict is an edict; after all, it is forbidden to fight."

"But this encounter, Sire, resembled in nothing a duel; it was an affray; and the proof is that there were five guards against three musketeers and M. d'Artagnan."

"That's true," said the King; "but all the same, come by the private stair."

Tréville smiled. But as he had accomplished a great deal in getting this child to rebel against his master, he respectfully saluted the King and took leave of him.

The same evening the three musketeers were warned of the honour which awaited them. They were not too much exalted, as they had long known the King; but D'Artagnan, with his Gascon imagination, saw his fortune made, and passed the night in dreaming golden dreams.

The next morning M. de Tréville and the three musketeers, with D'Artagnan, presented themselves at the Louvre and were shown to the King's private ante-room. Then the door of the King's cabinet opened and his Majesty appeared.

"Come in, my brave fellows," said the King; "I have to scold you."

The musketeers approached, bowing; and D'Artagnan followed them.

"That Gascon face over there, especially. Come here, sir."

D'Artagnan approached, assuming an air of the greatest contrition.

"What! you say it was this young man, this lad, who dealt Jussac such a blow? Why, he is a real demon, this Gascon, *ventre Saint Gris*, M. de Tréville, as the King, my father, would have said. If he goes on at that rate, he will hole a good many doublets, and break a good many swords. La Chesnaye, see if by searching my pockets you can find forty pistoles. And now, young man, your hand on your conscience, how did all this happen?"

D'Artagnan related the adventure—in all its details.

"I am satisfied," said the King, taking a handful of gold from La Chesnaye, and putting it into the hand of D'Artagnan. "Here is a proof of my satisfaction," he said.

In no way humiliated, for in those days it was customary for a gentleman to be proffered pecuniary reward by the sovereign, D'Artagnan put the forty pistoles in his pocket, and thanked his Majesty.

"Ah!" said the King, looking at the clock, "it is now

half-past eight ; you may retire, for I expect another visitor at nine. Thanks for your devotion, gentlemen ; I can count upon it, can I not ? "

" Oh, Sire," said the four companions with one voice, " we will allow ourselves to be cut to pieces for your Majesty."

" Very good ! but remain whole ; that will be better. Tréville," added the King in a whisper, " as you have no vacancy in the Musketeers, you might put this young man for a time into the company of M. des Essarts. Ah, Tréville ! I rejoice to think of the face the Cardinal will make ; he will be furious, but I don't care : I am in the right."

The King saluted Tréville with his hand. On rejoining his musketeers, he found them dividing the forty pistoles with D'Artagnan.

And the Cardinal, as his Majesty had foretold, was furious—so furious, that for a week he did not play with the King, which did not prevent his Majesty receiving him in the most charming way, and asking him, in the most caressing voice, " Well, Cardinal, how goes it with poor Jussac ? "

CHAPTER VII

THE MUSKETEERS AT HOME

WHEN D'Artagnan had left the Louvre, and had consulted his friends as to what he should do with his share of the forty pistoles, Athos advised him to order a good repast at the Pomme de Pin, Porthos to take a lackey, and Aramis to procure a suitable mistress.

The repast took place the same day, and the lackey waited at table. Athos ordered the dinner, and Porthos furnished the lackey—a Picard whom he had found on the bridge of La Tournelle, spitting into the water. Porthos pretended that this occupation was a proof of a reflecting and contemplative organization, and he had engaged him without further recommendation. The noble mien of this gentleman, for whose service he thought he was being engaged, had attracted Planchet, who was disappointed when he found the place already occupied by a certain Mousqueton, and when Porthos told him that as his means did not permit him to have two domestics, he had engaged him to enter the service of D'Artagnan. However, after dinner, when he saw his master pull out a handful of gold, he thought his fortune made,

and thanked Heaven that he had fallen in with such a Crœsus. But in the evening, while making his master's bed, Planchet's visions of wealth vanished. There was only one bed in the apartment, which consisted of an antechamber and a sleeping-room. Planchet slept in the antechamber on a blanket taken from D'Artagnan's bed.

Athos had a valet called Grimaud, whom he had trained in a manner peculiar to himself. This worthy nobleman was very silent. During the five or six years of his intimacy with Porthos and Aramis, they had often seen him smile, but had never heard him laugh. His words were few and expressive ; he said what he meant, and nothing more. Although Athos was barely thirty years old, and possessed great beauty of mind and body, he was not known to have a mistress. He never spoke about women. He did not object to others speaking of them before him, but it was easy to see by his remarks that the subject was not agreeable. His reserve, his aloofness, and his silence made almost an old man of him ; he had, therefore, in order not to depart from his habits, trained Grimaud to obey him on a mere gesture or movement of the lips. He spoke to him only on important occasions.

Sometimes Grimaud, who dreaded his master like fire, while being greatly attached to him, misunderstood an order, and did precisely the contrary. Then Athos shrugged his shoulders, and, without losing his temper, trounced Grimaud. On these days he spoke a little.

The character of Porthos, as we have seen, was the very opposite to that of Athos. He not only spoke much, but spoke loud, no matter whether anyone listened or not. He spoke of everything but the sciences, which he declared he had hated from his youth. He had not the fine bearing of Athos ; this had made him unjust to that gentleman at the beginning of their acquaintance, and he had endeavoured to outshine him in the splendour of his dress. In his unadorned habit of the Musketeers Athos immediately consigned the sumptuous Porthos to second place merely by the manner in which he threw back his head and strode forward. Porthos consoled himself by filling the antechamber of M. de Tréville, and the guard-room, with stories of his *bonnes fortunes*, a topic which Athos never touched. The talk of the moment was of nothing less than a foreign princess, who, Porthos said, was exceedingly kind to him.

An old proverb says, " Like master, like man." Let us pass, then, from the valet of Athos to the valet of Porthos ; from Grimaud to Mousqueton.

Mousqueton was a Norman, whose pacific name of Boniface had been changed into the sonorous Mousqueton. He had entered the service of his master on condition that he should be dressed and lodged only, but that handsomely. Also, he was to have two hours a day to devote to an industry which should supply his other necessities. Porthos had accepted this bargain, and the arrangement worked well. He had doublets made for Mousqueton out of his old clothes, and, thanks to an intelligent tailor, who turned his things and made them look like new, Mousqueton cut a very good figure behind his master.

As for Aramis, whose character we have already outlined, his lackey was named Bazin. Because of the hope entertained by his master of one day entering holy orders, he was always clothed in black, as becomes the servant of a Churchman. He was from Berri, was about forty years of age, gentle, fat, fond of reading pious works in his leisure moments, and capable of cooking a small dinner well. In addition, he was dumb, blind, deaf, and of the most tried fidelity.

Athos lived in the Rue Ferou, close to the Luxembourg ; his apartment consisted of two little rooms, nicely furnished, in a lodging-house, the hostess of which, still young and pretty, made eyes at him in vain.

Porthos lived in an apartment of vast and sumptuous appearance, in the Rue du Vieux Colombiers. Each time that he passed with a friend before the windows, at one of which Mousqueton, in his best livery, was to be seen, Porthos pointed up and said, " There is my dwelling ! " But he was never to be found at home, and he never invited anyone to go up.

As for Aramis, he inhabited a little lodging consisting of a boudoir, a dining-room, and a bedroom which looked on a small shady garden screened from the eyes of the neighbourhood.

As for D'Artagnan, we know how he was lodged ; and we have already made the acquaintance of his valet, Master Planchet.

D'Artagnan, who was of an inquisitive disposition, like all persons who have a talent for intrigue, made every effort to find out who Athos, Porthos, and Aramis really were—especially Athos, who was obviously of noble birth. So he applied to Porthos for information respecting Athos and Aramis, and to Aramis with regard to Porthos.

Unfortunately, Porthos knew little of the past of his silent friend, Athos. It was said that he had been unfortunate in love, and that his life had been poisoned by a heartless betrayal, the details of which were, however, unknown.

As for Porthos, with the exception of his real name, which, like that of his two comrades, was known only to M. de Tréville, the details of his life were well known. Vain and indiscreet, he was as transparent as crystal. The only thing which might deceive an investigator was the good he said of himself.

As for Aramis, while appearing to have no secrets, he was mystery itself, he would answer little regarding others, and eluded all questions of a personal nature.

In spite of all his efforts, D'Artagnan could learn nothing more of his three friends. In the meantime he looked upon Athos as an Achilles, Porthos as an Ajax, and Aramis as a Joseph.

The four young men now lived together in common. D'Artagnan, arriving from the country, had no fixed habits, and falling into the middle of a new world, he adopted those of his friends. They rose at eight o'clock in winter, and at six in summer, and repaired to the *hôtel* of M. de Tréville to receive orders. D'Artagnan, though not a musketeer, did the duty of one with great punctuality. He was always on guard, as he kept company with the one of his three friends who was on duty. M. de Tréville, who had appreciated him from the first, never ceased commending him to the King.

On their side, the three musketeers greatly liked their young comrade. The friendship which united these four men, and their need for seeing each other three or four times a day, for a duel, for business, or for pleasure, kept them inseparable, constantly running after each other like shadows.

One fine day the King ordered M. des Essarts to take D'Artagnan into his company of Guards, as a cadet. It was with a sigh that D'Artagnan donned that uniform which he would, at the price of ten years of his life, have exchanged against the cloak of a musketeer. But M. de Tréville promised him this favour after a noviciate of two years, which might be abridged if an opportunity came to render some service to the King, or to perform some brilliant action.

D'Artagnan began his service the next day. It was now the turn of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis to mount guard with D'Artagnan. Thus the company of M. des Essarts was richer by four men.

CHAPTER VIII

A COURT INTRIGUE

HOWEVER, the forty pistoles of the King, like all things in this world, after having a beginning, had an end, and from that period our four friends had fallen into embarrassment. D'Artagnan looked upon himself as a burden on his companions, and he set his mind, which was ill at ease, actively to work. He reflected that this coalition of four brave, enterprising, and active young men should have some other aim than mere swagger, sword-play, and a flow of more or less witty banter.

Without doubt, four men devoted to each other, body and soul, always supporting each other, threatening with their four arms the four cardinal points, must inevitably, by some means or another, be able to open a road toward the goal they wished to attain. The only thing which astonished D'Artagnan was that his companions had never thought of this.

He thought seriously of it himself, racking his brain to find an employment for this force, with which he doubted not that, as with the lever sought by Archimedes, he would be able to upheave the world, when some one knocked gently at the door. D'Artagnan awoke Planchet, and ordered him to open it.

The reader must not imagine that it was night. It had only just struck four o'clock. Two hours before Planchet had asked his master for some dinner, and he had replied with the proverb, " Whoever sleeps dines," and Planchet was dining by sleeping.

A man was introduced, of simple appearance, who appeared to be a *bourgeois*. Planchet, by way of dessert, would have liked to have listened to the conversation, but the stranger declared that what he had to say was important and confidential. D'Artagnan dismissed Planchet, and begged his visitor to be seated.

There was a moment's silence, during which the two men looked at each other by way of making acquaintance, after which D'Artagnan bowed as a sign that he was listening.

" I have heard M. d'Artagnan spoken of as a very brave young man," said the visitor, " and the reputation he enjoys induces me to confide a secret to him."

" Speak, sir," said D'Artagnan, who instinctively scented something to his advantage.

The *bourgeois*, after a fresh pause, continued :

" My wife is seamstress to the Queen, and is neither deficient in virtue nor beauty. I married her three years ago, although she

had but a small portion, because M. de la Porte, who is the Queen's cloak-bearer and her godfather, protects her——"

"Well, sir?"

"Well, my wife was carried off yesterday morning as she was leaving her workroom."

"And by whom?"

"I am not certain, sir, but I suspect some one."

"And who is the person you suspect?"

"A man who has been running after her for a long time."

"*Diable!*"

"May I speak my mind, sir? I am convinced that there is less love than political intrigue in all this."

"Less love than politics—and whom do you suspect?"

"I hardly know if I should tell you."

"Sir, I would have you observe that I ask you nothing. It is you who have come to tell me that you have a secret to confide to me. Do as you like; there is still time for you to retire."

"No, sir, no; you appear to be an honest young man, and I will have confidence in you. I believe that it is not on account of a love-affair of her own that my wife has been arrested, but on account of a lady greater than she."

"Ah! can it be on account of Madame de Bois-Tracy?" said D'Artagnan, who wished to appear well acquainted with the affairs of the Court.

"Higher, sir, higher."

"Of Madame d'Aiguillon?"

"Higher still."

"Of Madame de Chevreuse?"

"Higher, much higher."

"Of the ——" D'Artagnan stopped.

"Yes, sir," answered the terrified *bourgeois*, in a hardly audible whisper.

"With whom?"

"With whom could it be but with the Duke of ——"

"The Duke of ——?"

"Yes, sir."

"But how do you know all that?"

"Ah! how do I know it?"

"Yes; by half-confidences or—you understand."

"I know it through my wife, sir."

"Who knows it, from whom?"

"From M. de la Porte. Have I not already told you that she is the godchild of M. de la Porte, the confidential man of the

Queen? M. de la Porte had placed her in the service of her Majesty so that our poor Queen might have some one in whom she could trust, abandoned as she is by the King, spied upon as she is by the Cardinal, and betrayed as she is by all."

"Ah! I begin to understand," said D'Artagnan.

"Now, my wife came to see me four days ago. One of the conditions of her service is that she should visit me twice a week, for, as I have the honour to inform you, she loves me dearly. Well, then, my wife came and confided to me that the Queen was at present in mortal fear."

"Really?"

"Yes; it appears that the Cardinal persecutes her more than ever. He cannot forgive her the *sarabande*. You know the story?"

"*Pardieu!* Do I know it!" said D'Artagnan, who knew nothing at all, but who wished to appear well informed.

"So that now it is not a question of hatred, but of vengeance."

"Really?"

"And the Queen believes——"

"Well, what does the Queen believe?"

"She believes that they have written to the Duke of Buckingham in her name."

"In the name of the Queen?"

"Yes, to get him to come to Paris; and once here, to lure him into a trap."

"*Diable!* But what has your wife to do with all that?"

"Her devotion to the Queen is known, and they want either to part her from her mistress, or to intimidate her, in order to learn the secrets of her Majesty, or to seduce her in order to use her as a spy."

"This is probable; but do you know the man who has carried her off?"

"I have told you that I believe that I know him."

"His name?"

"I do not know it; I only know that he is a creature of the Cardinal, his *âme damnée*."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes; my wife pointed him out one day."

"Is there any sign by which he may be known?"

"Yes, certainly; he is a nobleman of lofty mien, dark complexion, penetrating eyes, white teeth, and a scar on his temple."

"A scar on his temple!" cried D'Artagnan; "that is my man of Meung."

"That is your man, you say?"

"Yes; but never mind. No, I am mistaken; on the contrary, if your man is mine, I shall reap two vengeances at one blow. But where to find your man?"

"I cannot say."

"You have no information as to where he lives?"

"No; one day as I took my wife back to the Louvre, he was coming out, and she pointed him out to me."

"*Diable! diable!* all this is very vague. Who told you that your wife had been carried off?"

"M. de la Porte."

"Did he give you any details?"

"He had none to give."

"And you have learned nothing elsewhere?"

"Yes, I received——"

"What?"

"But I am perhaps committing a great imprudence?"

"You return to that; but allow me to observe that now you have gone too far to retreat."

"I do not retreat, *mordieu*," cried the *bourgeois*, swearing to keep up his courage. "Besides, on the word of Bonacieux——"

"Your name is Bonacieux?"

"Yes, that is my name."

"Pardon if I interrupt you, but I think I have heard that name already."

"That is quite possible, sir; I am your landlord."

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, half rising and bowing, "you are my landlord?"

"Yes, sir; and as during the three months that you have been my tenant, absorbed, no doubt, by important business, you have forgotten to pay your rent; and, as I say, I have not once dunned you, you would take my delicacy into consideration."

"Naturally, my dear M. Bonacieux, I am extremely grateful, and if I can be of any service——"

"I believe you, sir; and as I was going to say, I have perfect confidence in you."

"Finish, then, what you began to say."

The *bourgeois* drew a paper from his pocket, and gave it to D'Artagnan.

"A letter!"

"Which I received this morning."

D'Artagnan opened it, and as it was growing dark, approached the window. The *bourgeois* followed him.

" ' Do not look for your wife,' " read D'Artagnan ; " ' she shall be restored to you when she is no longer wanted. Should you take any steps to find her, you are lost.' "

" This is very clear," said D'Artagnan, " but it is only a threat."

" Yes, but a threat which terrifies me. I am not a man of the sword, and I dread the Bastille."

" Hum ! but I like the Bastille no better than you," said D'Artagnan. " If it were merely a matter of a sword-thrust I wouldn't mind."

" And yet, sir, I counted upon you in this affair."

" Yes ? "

" Seeing you always surrounded by the superb musketeers of M. de Tréville, and consequently by the enemies of the Cardinal, I thought that you and your friends, while seeing justice done to our poor Queen, would be glad to play his Eminence a trick."

" No doubt."

" Then I thought that owing me three months' rent for which I have not asked——"

" Yes, yes, you have already given that reason, which is excellent."

" And in addition, that as long as you do me the honour to remain in my house, there will be no question of paying rent——"

" Very good."

" And, beyond that, if need be, wishing to offer you fifty pistoles, should you, contrary to all probability, find yourself momentarily embarrassed."

" Excellent ! You are then rich, my dear M. Bonacieux ? "

" I am well-to-do, sir ; I have gained a few thousand crowns a year in my mercer's business ; so you understand, sir—ah ! " cried the *bourgeois*.

" What ? " asked D'Artagnan.

" What do I see there ? "

" Where ? "

" In the street, in front of your windows—a man wrapped in a cloak."

" 'Tis he ! " cried D'Artagnan and the *bourgeois* together, each having recognized his man.

" Ah, this time," cried D'Artagnan, snatching up his sword, " he shall not escape me ! " And drawing his sword, he dashed out of the room.

On the stair he met Athos and Porthos, who were coming to see him. They made way, and D'Artagnan darted between them.

"How now! where are you running to?" cried the two musketeers.

"The man of Meung!" shouted D'Artagnan, and disappeared.

D'Artagnan had more than once related to his friends his adventure with this man, as also the apparition of the lovely traveller to whom this man had confided an important mission.

The opinion of Athos was that D'Artagnan had lost the letter in the scuffle. A gentleman, according to him, would be incapable of doing anything so base as to steal a letter.

Porthos saw nothing in it but a rendezvous given by a lady to a gentleman, and which had been disturbed by D'Artagnan and his yellow horse. Aramis had said that as occurrences of the kind are mysterious, it is best not to try to fathom them. Thinking that D'Artagnan would soon return, the two musketeers went up to his room, which they found empty. The landlord, fearing the consequences of an encounter, which he had no doubt would take place between the young man and the stranger, had judged it prudent to retire.

CHAPTER IX

D'ARTAGNAN REVEALS HIMSELF

AS Athos and Porthos had foreseen, D'Artagnan returned in half an hour. He had again missed his man, who had disappeared as if by enchantment. D'Artagnan had run, sword in hand, through all the neighbouring streets without finding the person he was looking for. He had knocked a dozen times at the door against which he had seen the unknown leaning, but all in vain. The neighbours, attracted by the noise, had put their noses out of their windows and declared that the house was empty, and had not been inhabited for the last six months.

While D'Artagnan was rushing about the streets and hammering at doors, Aramis had joined his two companions, so that on returning to his room D'Artagnan found the company complete.

"Well?" asked the three musketeers, on seeing D'Artagnan enter, his brow bathed in perspiration and his face distorted with rage.

"Well," he cried, tossing his sword on the bed, "this man must be the devil in person. He disappeared like a phantom or a spectre. Man or devil, body or shadow, illusion or reality, this

man was born for my damnation, for his flight has made us miss a superb affair, which might have brought us in a hundred pistoles, and more, perhaps."

"But, come, tell us, what's all this about?" asked Porthos.

"Yes," said Aramis, "confide in us, my dear friend, unless the honour of some lady be concerned."

"Be quite at rest," replied D'Artagnan; "no one's honour will suffer."

And he went on to relate, word for word, to his friends what had passed between him and his landlord, and how the man who had carried off the wife of his landlord was the one with whom he had fallen out at the Franc Meunier inn.

"Your affair is not bad," said Athos, "and we may be able to get fifty or sixty pistoles out of this excellent fellow. Now, it remains to be known whether it is worth while risking four heads for that sum."

"We must not forget," cried D'Artagnan, "that there is a woman in the case—a woman carried off, who is doubtless being threatened, perhaps tortured, and all because she is faithful to her mistress!"

"Take care, D'Artagnan!" said Aramis; "I think you are getting a little too heated over the fate of Madame Bonacieux. Woman was created for our destruction, and it is from her that come all our woes."

At this wise saw Athos frowned and bit his lip.

"It is not for Madame Bonacieux that I care," said D'Artagnan, "but for the Queen, who, abandoned by the King and persecuted by the Cardinal, sees the heads of all her friends fall one after the other."

"Why does she love what we detest most in the world—the Spaniards and the English?"

"Spain is her country," said D'Artagnan, "and it is only natural that she should love Spaniards. As for the second reproach, I have heard it said that she loves not the English, but one Englishman."

"And, by my faith," said Athos, "I must admit that this Englishman is worthy of being loved; I never saw a man who carried himself with greater distinction."

"Not to mention that he dresses better than anyone," said Porthos. "I was at the Louvre the day when his pearls scattered, and I picked up two which I sold for ten pistoles apiece. Do you know him, Aramis?"

"As well as you, gentlemen; I was one of those who arrested

him in the garden at Amiens. I was at the seminary at the time, and I was sorry for the King."

"Which would not hinder me," said D'Artagnan, "if I knew where the Duke of Buckingham was, from taking him by the hand and leading him to the Queen, if only to annoy the Cardinal; for our real, only, and eternal enemy, gentlemen, is the Cardinal, and if we could find means to play him a really cruel trick, I confess that I should willingly risk my head."

"And," went on Athos, "the mercer says that the Queen thinks they have brought Buckingham over upon a false invitation?"

"That's what she fears."

"Wait a bit," said Aramis.

"What is it?" asked Porthos.

"Proceed, I am trying to recall certain facts."

"And now I am convinced," said D'Artagnan, "that the abduction of the Queen's woman is connected with the events of which we are speaking, and perhaps with the presence of the Duke in Paris."

"Gentlemen," broke in Aramis, "listen to this: Yesterday I was at the house of a doctor of theology, whom I consult at times in connexion with my studies."

Athos smiled.

"He lives in a deserted quarter—his tastes and his profession require it. Just as I was leaving him——"

Here Aramis stopped.

"Well?" asked his auditors, "as you were leaving him?"

Aramis made an effort like a person, who, while telling a falsehood, finds himself suddenly arrested by an unforeseen obstacle; but the eyes of his three companions were fixed upon him, and there was no possibility of retreat.

"The doctor has a niece," continued Aramis.

The three friends began to laugh.

"Ah! if you laugh or if you doubt my word," added Aramis, "you shall know nothing."

"We believe like Mahometans, and are as mute as catafalques," said Athos.

"Then I will go on," said Aramis. "This niece comes sometimes to see her uncle. Now yesterday she was there quite by accident at the same time as I was, and I offered to conduct her to her carriage. Suddenly a tall, dark man, with the airs of a gentleman—a man just in the style of that one of yours, D'Artagnan——"

" Perhaps the same," said D'Artagnan.

" Very possibly," went on Aramis, "—approached me, accompanied by five or six men, and in the most polite way said, ' M. the Duke, and you, madame '—addressing the lady on my arm——"

" The doctor's niece ? "

" ' —will you get into this carriage without any noise, and without attempting any resistance ? ' "

" He took you for the Duke of Buckingham ! " cried D'Artagnan.

" I think so," said Aramis.

" But this lady ? " asked Porthos.

" He took her for the Queen ! " said D'Artagnan.

" Exactly so ! " replied Aramis.

" The Gascon is the devil ! " said Athos ; " nothing escapes him."

" The fact is," said Porthos, " that Aramis somewhat resembles in figure the handsome Duke ; but it seems to me that the musketeer's coat——"

" I had on an enormous cloak," said Aramis.

" In the month of July, *diable* ! " cried Porthos : " does the doctor fear that you should be recognized ? "

" I can understand," said Athos, " the spy being deceived by the form ; but the face ? "

" I had a large hat on," said Aramis.

" Good gracious ! what precautions for studying theology ! "

" Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, " do not let us lose time in banter. Let us scatter and try to find the wife of the mercer, she is the key to the mystery."

" A woman of such inferior condition ! Do you think so, D'Artagnan ? " said Porthos disdainfully.

" She is the godchild of La Porte, the confidential valet of the Queen. And besides, her Majesty has perhaps intentionally sought support so low. High heads are seen from a distance, and the Cardinal has good eyes."

" Well," said Porthos, " make a good price with the mercer."

" There is no need," said D'Artagnan, " for if he does not pay us I think we shall be sufficiently paid in another quarter."

At this moment hurried steps were heard on the stairs, the door was burst open, and the unhappy mercer rushed into the council-room.

" Ah ! gentlemen," he cried, " save me, in the name of Heaven. There are four men who have come to arrest me ; save me ! "

Porthos and Aramis stood up.

"One moment," said D'Artagnan, making a sign to them to sheath their swords, which they had half drawn. "It isn't courage that is wanted here, but prudence."

"But," said Porthos, "we cannot permit——"

"Leave it to D'Artagnan," said Athos; "I repeat that he has the shrewdest head of us all, and as far as I am concerned, I will obey him."

At this moment the four guards appeared at the door, and, seeing four musketeers, they hesitated.

"Come in, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "this is my apartment, and we are all humble servants of the King and the Cardinal."

"Then you will not oppose us in carrying out our orders?"

"On the contrary, gentlemen, we will help you, if necessary."

"But you promised me——" said the poor mercer, in a whisper.

"We can only save you by remaining free," whispered D'Artagnan, "and if we attempt to defend you we shall be arrested with you."

"Yet it seems to me——"

"Come in, gentlemen, come in," said D'Artagnan aloud; "I have no motive in defending monsieur, whom I see to-day for the first time; he comes to claim his rent. Is not that true, M. Bonacieux?"

"It is the pure truth," replied the mercer, "but you do not say——"

"Silence about me, about my friends, and, above all, about the Queen, or you will ruin all of us without saving yourself. Come, gentlemen, you may take this man with you."

And D'Artagnan pushed the bewildered mercer into the hands of the guards.

"You are a knave, my friend," he said, "coming to ask me, a musketeer, for money! To prison with him, and keep him under lock and key as long as possible. That will give me time to pay."

The guards were profuse in their thanks, and took away their prey.

"What devil's trick are you up to now?" asked Porthos, when the four companions found themselves alone. "What, four musketeers allow an unfortunate man to be taken from their midst? A gentleman drink with a bailiff?"

"Porthos," said Aramis, "Athos has warned you that you are a simpleton, and I am of his opinion. D'Artagnan, you are a great man, and when you succeed M. de Tréville I shall implore your influence to get me an abbey."

"Ah! but I'm all at sea," cried Porthos. "You approve of what D'Artagnan has done?"

"Perfectly," said Athos; "not only that, but I congratulate him."

"And now, gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, without giving himself the trouble to explain his conduct to Porthos; "all for one, one for all; that is our device, is it not?"

"But——" said Porthos.

"Stretch out your hand and swear," cried Athos and Aramis.

Making no further resistance, Porthos stretched out his hand, and the four friends repeated with one voice:

"All for one, one for all."

"That's well; now each of you go home," said D'Artagnan, as though used to command all his life, "and be on your guard, for from this moment we have the Cardinal to reckon with."

CHAPTER X

A MOUSETRAP IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

THE invention of the mousetrap does not date from our days. As soon as society invented the police, the police invented the mousetrap.

As our readers may not be familiar with police slang, let us explain what a mousetrap is.

When in a house an individual has been arrested, suspected of some crime, his arrest is kept secret. Four or five men are placed in ambush within; the door is opened to every one who knocks, and then closed upon them. Thus, in the course of a few days, all the familiars of the establishment are caught.

A mousetrap was, therefore, established in the apartment of Bonacieux, and whoever came there was taken and interrogated by the Cardinal's people. Of course, those who came to see D'Artagnan were excepted, since entry to his apartment was by a separate stair.

Besides, he had no visitors but the three musketeers, who, in spite of their researches, had discovered nothing. Athos had even questioned M. de Tréville, who, in view of the habitual silence of the worthy musketeer, had been somewhat astonished. But M. de Tréville knew nothing except that the last time he had seen the King, the Queen, and the Cardinal, the latter appeared thoughtful, the King uneasy, and the red eyes of the Queen showed that

she had been weeping. This circumstance was not remarkable because since her marriage she had wept much.

As for D'Artagnan, he did not stir out. He had converted his room into an observatory. From the window he saw those who came to be caught, and having removed a board in the floor, he heard all that passed between them and the inquisitors. The interrogatories, preceded by a minute search of the person arrested, were usually of this sort :

" Did Madame Bonacieux give you anything for her husband or for anyone else ? "

" Did M. Bonacieux hand you anything for his wife or for anyone else ? "

" Did either of them entrust you with any confidences ? "

" If they knew anything they would not put these questions," thought D'Artagnan. " Now what are they trying to find out ? Whether the Duke of Buckingham is in Paris, and whether he has had or is to have an interview with the Queen." D'Artagnan fastened upon this conclusion.

In the meantime the mousetrap continued at work, and D'Artagnan maintained his vigilance.

On the evening of the day after the arrest of poor Bonacieux, as Athos was leaving D'Artagnan to go to M. de Tréville, and as Planchet was beginning to make the bed, there was a knock at the street door, which was immediately opened and closed. Some one had been caught. D'Artagnan stretched himself on the floor to listen. Soon cries were heard, then stifled groans. There was no question of an interrogatory.

" *Diable !* " said D'Artagnan, " it seems to be a woman ; they are searching her ; she resists ; they use violence—the wretches ! "

And D'Artagnan, in spite of his prudence, could hardly refrain from rushing to the rescue.

" But I tell you that I am the mistress of the house, sirs ; I am Madame Bonacieux. I tell you that I belong to the Queen," cried the unfortunate woman.

" Madame Bonacieux ! " murmured D'Artagnan ; " can I have been so fortunate as to find what every one is looking for ? "

" It is you whom we were waiting for," replied the inquisitors.

The voice became more and more stifled. There was a great tumult. The victim was resisting, as much as a woman could resist four men.

" Pardon, gentlemen, pard——" and the sounds became inarticulate.

" They are gagging her, and taking her away," cried

D'Artagnan, jumping up as if moved by a spring. "My sword! Good! I have it by my side. Planchet!"

"Sir?"

"Run and fetch Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. Tell them to bring their weapons, to make haste. Ah! I remember, Athos is gone to see M. de Tréville."

"But where are you going, sir?"

"I am going down by the window, in order to arrive the sooner. As for you, replace the board, sweep the floor, and run where I told you."

"Oh! sir, sir! you are going to get yourself killed," cried Planchet.

"Hold your tongue, idiot," said D'Artagnan, and hanging from the window-sill, he dropped from the first floor, which was not high, without hurting himself.

Then he knocked at the door, murmuring:

"I am going to be taken in my turn in the mousetrap, and woe to the cats who rub up against such a mouse."

The knocker had hardly sounded when the tumult ceased, steps approached, the door opened, and D'Artagnan, naked sword in hand, rushed into the apartment of M. Bonacieux, the door of which was immediately closed. Then those who inhabited the unfortunate house, and the near neighbours, heard cries and stamping, the clashing of swords, and the breaking of furniture. In a moment all the windows were opened and the neighbours saw four men, dressed in black, flying out of the door like crows who had left their feathers behind; that is to say, their clothes had been torn to ribbons.

Left alone with Madame Bonacieux, D'Artagnan turned toward her; the poor woman was lying back in an armchair half fainting. D'Artagnan rapidly examined her. She was a charming woman of about twenty-five years, dark, with blue eyes, the nose slightly turned up, white teeth, and a complexion of rose and opal. But here ended the signs which might have led one to take her for a lady of degree. Her hands were white, but without delicacy; her feet were not those of a woman of quality. Happily D'Artagnan did not yet trouble himself as to these details.

While D'Artagnan was examining Madame Bonacieux he saw on the ground a fine cambric handkerchief, which he picked up, and in the corner of which he recognized the same monogram as on that over which he and Aramis were near cutting each other's throats.

Since then D'Artagnan distrusted handkerchiefs with coats-of-arms, so he quietly put back the one he had just picked up into the pocket of Madame Bonacieux. At this moment Madame Bonacieux came to her senses. She opened her eyes, looked round her with terror, saw that the apartment was empty, and that she was alone with her deliverer. She stretched out her hands to him, smiling. Madame Bonacieux had the most charming smile in the world.

"Ah, sir!" she said, "you have saved me. Allow me to thank you."

"Madame," said D'Artagnan, "I have only acted as a gentleman should, and you owe me no thanks."

"Yes, indeed; and I hope to be able to prove my gratitude. But what did those men want? I took them for robbers at first. Why is M. Bonacieux not here?"

"Madame, these men are more dangerous than robbers, for they are agents of the Cardinal. As for your husband, he was taken to the Bastille yesterday."

"To the Bastille!" cried Madame Bonacieux. "Good gracious! What has the poor man done? He is innocence itself."

And something like a smile flitted across the face of the still frightened young woman.

"What he has done, madame? I believe his only crime is that he has the good and the evil fortune to be your husband."

"But, sir, you know then——"

"I know that you were carried off, madame."

"And who told you? Oh! if you know, tell me."

"By a man about forty years of age, with black hair, a dark complexion, and a scar on his left temple."

"That is the man; but his name?"

"Ah! That's just what I don't know."

"And my husband? Was he aware that I had been carried off?"

"He was informed by a letter written by the ravisher himself."

"And does he suspect the cause?" asked Madame Bonacieux, with some embarrassment.

"He attributed it, I believe, to political reasons."

"I had my doubts at first, but now I am of his opinion. So, then, my dear Bonacieux never for a moment suspected me——?"

"Far from that, madame, he was too proud of your virtue, and, above all, of your love."

A second smile flitted over the rosy lips of the young woman.

"But," continued D'Artagnan, "how did you escape?"

"I took advantage of being left alone for a moment, and, with the aid of my sheets, I let myself down from the window. Then I came here, thinking to find my husband."

"To place yourself under his protection?"

"Oh, no, poor dear man; I knew he was unable to defend me, but he might be of use in another way, and I wished to warn him."

"Of what?"

"Oh, that is not my secret, so I cannot tell you."

"Besides," said D'Artagnan, "this is not a fitting place for making confidential communications. The men I have put to flight will soon return in force; if they find us here we shall be lost. I have sent word to my three friends; but who knows if it has been possible to find them?"

"Yes, you are right," cried Madame Bonacieux, terrified; "let us fly."

At these words she took D'Artagnan's arm and dragged him along.

"But fly where?" said D'Artagnan.

"First of all, let us leave this house; then we shall see."

And the young woman and the young man, without troubling to shut the door behind them, went down the street, and did not stop till they had reached the Place Saint-Sulpice.

"And now what are we to do?" asked D'Artagnan; "where shall I take you?"

"I hardly know," said Madame Bonacieux; "my intention was to get my husband to warn M. de la Porte, so that he might inform me what has happened at the Louvre during the last three days, and if I could return without danger."

"But I can go and see M. de la Porte?"

"No doubt, but there is a difficulty: M. Bonacieux is known at the Louvre, and allowed to pass, but you are not known and would not be permitted to enter."

"Bah!" said D'Artagnan; "surely at some wicket there is a porter devoted to you, who, on hearing a password——"

Madame Bonacieux looked steadily at the young man.

"And if I were to give you this password, would you forget it as soon as you have made use of it?"

"On my honour as a gentleman."

"I believe you; you look like a young man that may be trusted; besides, your fortune will perhaps be made if you are loyal."

"I will do, without any promise, and conscientiously, all I can to serve the King and to be agreeable to the Queen. Dispose of me as of a friend."

"But where will you leave me meanwhile?"

"Have you no one at whose house M. de la Porte could find you?"

"No, I will trust no one."

"Wait," said D'Artagnan, "we are at the door of Athos."

"Who is Athos?"

"One of my friends."

"But if he is there, and if he sees me?"

"He is not there, and I will take the key away with me."

"But if he should return?"

"He will not return; besides, he shall be told what has happened."

"But that will compromise me."

"What matters? No one knows you. Besides, we are in such a position that we cannot afford to be too particular as to propriety."

"Then let us go to your friend's house. Where does he live?"

"Rue Ferou, two steps from here."

As D'Artagnan had foreseen, Athos was not at home; he took the key, went upstairs, and introduced Madame Bonacieux into the little apartment, which we have already described.

He said, "You are quite at home; shut the door inside, and do not open to any unless they knock three times thus," and he knocked three times in a peculiar manner.

"That's agreed. Now to give you my instructions. Present yourself at the gate of the Louvre, on the side of the Rue de l'Échelle, and ask for Germain."

"And after?"

"He will ask you what you want, and you will reply by these two words: Tours and Brussels. He will at once place himself at your disposal."

"And what shall I tell him to do?"

"To go and fetch M. de la Porte."

"And then?"

"You will send him to me."

"Very good; but where and how shall I see you again?"

"You wish greatly to see me again?"

"Certainly."

"Well, trust to me for that, and make your mind easy."

"I count upon your word."

D'Artagnan bowed to Madame Bonacieux, with the most amorous glance he could concentrate on her charming little person, and went downstairs. He reached the Louvre at two bounds; as he entered the gate ten o'clock was striking. All the events we have related had taken place within half an hour.

Everything passed as Madame Bonacieux had predicted. At the password Germain bowed, and ten minutes later M. de la Porte appeared. D'Artagnan told him where Madame Bonacieux was to be found: La Porte at once set out for the address, but he had hardly gone ten paces before he returned.

"Young man," he said to D'Artagnan; "a bit of advice. You may get into trouble over all this."

"You think so?"

"Yes. Have you some friend whose clock is slow?"

"Well?"

"Go and see him, so that he may swear that you were at his house at nine-thirty. In law that is called an alibi."

D'Artagnan considered the advice prudent, and rushed off as fast as he could to the *hôtel* of M. de Tréville. Instead of going into the *salon*, he obtained leave to go at once into the cabinet, and asked that M. de Tréville be informed that he had something important to say and solicited a private audience. Five minutes afterward, M. de Tréville asked D'Artagnan what he could do for him, and to what he owed this visit at so late an hour.

"Pardon, sir," said D'Artagnan, who had seized the opportunity of being alone to put back the clock three-quarters of an hour; "but I thought that as it is only twenty-five minutes past nine, I could yet present myself."

"Twenty-five minutes past nine," cried M. de Tréville; "impossible!"

"Look at the clock, sir," said D'Artagnan; "it bears me out."

"That's true," said M. de Tréville; "I thought it was later. Well, what can I do for you?"

Then D'Artagnan told M. de Tréville a long story about the Queen. He laid before him the fears he had conceived with regard to her Majesty, and related all he had heard respecting the projects of the Cardinal against the Duke of Buckingham, and told all with a tranquillity, a phlegm of which M. de Tréville was the dupe all the more easily as he had remarked something new between the King, the Cardinal, and the Queen.

As ten o'clock struck, D'Artagnan left M. de Tréville, who thanked him for his information. At the foot of the staircase D'Artagnan remembered that he had forgotten his cane; in consequence, he hurried back to the cabinet, and set the clock right. Assured thenceforth of a witness to prove his alibi, he went down the stairs and was soon in the street.

CHAPTER XI

THE PLOT DEVELOPS

HAVING paid his visit to M. de Tréville, D'Artagnan returned pensively home by the longest road. What was he thinking of? and why did he look at the stars, sometimes sighing, and sometimes smiling? He was thinking of Madame Bonacieux. For an apprentice musketeer the young woman was almost an ideal object of love. Pretty, mysterious, initiated in all the secrets of the Court, whose graceful features reflected such charming gravity, she was suspected of not being insensible; moreover, D'Artagnan had delivered her from the hands of those demons who wished to search and to ill-treat her, and this important service had established between them one of those feelings of gratitude, which so easily ripen into something more tender.

D'Artagnan, whose dreams travelled fast on the wings of imagination, saw himself already accosted by a messenger of the young woman, who handed him a *billet doux*, a gold chain, or a diamond.

But for the moment D'Artagnan was influenced by more noble and disinterested motives. The mercer had told him that he was rich; the young man guessed, that with a simpleton like Bonacieux, it was the wife who kept the purse. But all this had nothing to do with the feelings produced by the sight of Madame Bonacieux, and interest was almost foreign to this commencement of love. We say almost, for the idea that a young, pretty, graceful, and witty woman is rich also adds to her charms. There are so many things which enhance beauty: a fine white stocking, a silk dress, a lace chemisette, a pretty slipper, a new ribbon in the hair, do not make an ugly woman pretty, but they turn a pretty woman into a beauty.

D'Artagnan, while reflecting on his future love-affairs, speaking to the night, and smiling at the stars, was strolling up the Rue

Chasse Midi. Being in the quarter inhabited by Aramis, it occurred to him to pay his friend a visit, and to offer him some explanations with regard to the motives which had induced him to send Planchet with an invitation to come at once to the mouse-trap. Had Aramis been at home, he would at once have gone there, and finding no one, would have been at a loss what to think. This required an explanation. He thought, too, that this would be a good opportunity to talk about the pretty Madame Bonacieux, of whom his mind, if not his heart, was already full. In a first love one must not expect discretion. The first love is accompanied by so much joy that it runs over; but for that, it could not be borne.

Paris had been dark for two hours, and was becoming deserted. Eleven o'clock was striking; the weather was mild. D'Artagnan had just passed the Rue Casette, and already recognized the door of his friend, when he perceived something like a shadow issuing from the Rue Servandoni. This something was enveloped in a cloak, and D'Artagnan at first thought that it was a man, but by the small stature and the uncertainty of the gait he soon saw that it was a woman. Moreover, this woman seemed to be looking for a house of which she was not very sure, looking up, stopping, retracing her steps, and then returning again.

D'Artagnan was much puzzled. "Shall I offer her my services?" he thought. "Judging from her carriage, she must be young: perhaps she is pretty. Oh, yes! but a woman who runs about the streets at this hour goes out only to see her lover. *Peste!* If I were to disturb a rendezvous it would be a bad opening to an acquaintance." Meanwhile, the young woman continued to advance, counting the houses and windows, which was neither a long nor a difficult process. There were but three houses in this part of the street, and two windows looking on it.

"*Pardieu!*" said D'Artagnan to himself, the theologian's niece coming back to his mind, "it would be curious if this nocturnal dove should be looking for the house of our friend. Upon my soul, it looks very like it. My dear Aramis, this time I must clear up the mystery"; and D'Artagnan hid himself as well as he could in the darkest part of the street, near a stone bench within a recess.

The young woman came nearer and gave a little cough, which D'Artagnan took to be a signal. Either in consequence of some reply to this cough, or for some other reason, the nocturnal seeker boldly approached the shutters of Aramis, and knocked at three equal intervals.

"That is certainly the house of Aramis," murmured D'Artagnan. "Ah, master hypocrite, this is the way you study theology!" Hardly had the three taps been given than the inner window opened and a light appeared through the shutter. "Ah!" said the listener, "the visit was expected, and the lady is going to climb in by the window." But to the great astonishment of D'Artagnan the shutter remained closed. What is more, the light, which had shone for a moment, disappeared. D'Artagnan, thinking that things could not remain so, continued to look and to listen attentively.

He was right. After a few seconds two taps were heard from within. The young woman in the street replied, and the shutter opened slightly. Unfortunately the light had been withdrawn to another room, but the young man's eyes were growing accustomed to the night, and Gascons are said to have very keen sight, so D'Artagnan saw the young woman draw from her pocket a handkerchief, the corner of which she showed to the person within. This reminded D'Artagnan of the handkerchief he had found at the feet of Madame Bonacieux, which again had recalled the one which he had picked up at the feet of Aramis.

What the devil could this handkerchief mean? Placed where he was, D'Artagnan could not see the face of Aramis, for the young man had no doubt that it was his friend who was talking to the lady in the street. His curiosity overcame his prudence, and taking advantage of the interest shown by the two persons in the handkerchief, he left his hiding-place, and, quick as lightning, but without noise, reached an angle of the wall from which he could see into the apartment of Aramis. Arrived there, D'Artagnan nearly uttered a cry of surprise; it was not Aramis who was talking with the nocturnal visitor, but a woman. D'Artagnan saw her sufficiently well to distinguish her dress, but not her features.

At the same moment the woman within drew a second handkerchief from her pocket, and exchanged it for the one just shown to her. Then a few words were exchanged between the two women, and the shutter was closed. The woman outside turned round, and passed close to D'Artagnan, drawing down her hood; but this precaution was taken too late: D'Artagnan had already recognized Madame Bonacieux.

The suspicion that it was Madame Bonacieux had crossed his mind when she had drawn the handkerchief from her pocket. But how could Madame Bonacieux, who had sent for M. de la Porte to take her to the Louvre, be in the streets of Paris alone

at half-past eleven at night at the risk of being carried off a second time ?

It must be for some most important affair, and what is the important affair for a woman of twenty-five if not love ?

But was it on her own account, or on the account of some one else, that she exposed herself to such risks ? asked the young man, whose heart was already tortured by the demon of jealousy. There was a very simple way of finding out where Madame Bonacieux was going ; this was to follow her, which means D'Artagnan adopted. But at the sight of the young man detaching himself from the wall like a statue from its niche, Madame Bonacieux uttered a shriek and fled. D'Artagnan ran after her. It was not difficult to overtake a woman hampered by her cloak. When he caught her up she was already exhausted, not by fatigue, but by terror ; and when D'Artagnan placed his hand upon her shoulder, she fell on her knees, crying in a choking voice :

" Kill me, if you like, but you shall know nothing."

D'Artagnan raised her up, placing his arm round her waist ; but as he felt by her weight that she was about to faint, he hastened to reassure her with protestations of devotion. Madame Bonacieux recognized the voice of the young man and, opening her eyes, uttered a cry of joy.

" Ah ! it is you, it is you ! " she cried ; " thank God ! "

" Yes ; it is I, whom God has sent to watch over you."

" Was it with that intention that you followed me ? " asked the young woman with a coquettish smile, all fear having disappeared when she recognized her friend.

" No," said D'Artagnan ; " I must acknowledge that it was chance which threw me in your way. I saw a woman knocking at the window of one of my friends——"

" Of one of your friends ? " interrupted Madame Bonacieux.

" Yes ; Aramis is one of my best friends."

" Aramis ! who is he ? "

" Come, you are not going to tell me that you don't know Aramis ? "

" This is the first time I have heard his name pronounced."

" This is the first time, then, that you have come to this house ? "

" That is so."

" And you did not know that it was inhabited by a young man ? "

" No."

"It is not he, then, that you came for?"

"Not the least in the world. Besides, you saw that the person who spoke to me was a woman."

"But who is she?"

"Oh! that is not my secret."

"Dear Madame Bonacieux, you are adorable."

"Then give me your arm and escort me."

"Where?"

"You will see, since you will leave me at the door."

"Shall I wait for you?"

"There will be no need."

"You will return alone, then?"

"Perhaps yes, perhaps no."

"I shall know."

"How so?"

"I shall wait to see you come out."

"In that case, adieu! I have no further need of you."

"But you asked for——"

"The protection of a gentleman, and not the supervision of a spy."

"Come, madame, I see that I must do all you wish."

"And you will leave me afterward?"

"Yes."

"Without playing the spy?"

"Yes."

"On your word of honour?"

"On the faith of a gentleman."

"Then give me your arm."

D'Artagnan offered his arm to Madame Bonacieux, who hung upon it, half laughing, half trembling, and the pair reached the top of the Rue de la Harpe. Arrived there, the young woman seemed to hesitate, as she had already done in the Rue de Vaugirard. However, she appeared to recognize a door by certain signs, and approaching this door:

"Now, sir," she said, "it is here that I have business; a thousand thanks for your honourable company, which has saved me from all the dangers to which, had I been alone, I should have been exposed. But the moment is come for you to keep your word; I have reached my destination."

"And you will have nothing to fear when returning?"

"Nothing but robbers."

"Is that nothing?"

"What could they take? I haven't a penny on me."

"You forget that handsome embroidered and emblazoned handkerchief."

"Which one?"

"That which I found at your feet, and replaced in your pocket."

"Be silent, be silent!" exclaimed the young woman. "Would you ruin me?"

"You see there is still danger for you, since a single word makes you tremble, and you confess that if that word were overheard it would spell ruin for you. Come, madame!" said D'Artagnan, seizing her hand, "be more generous, and put faith in me; have you not read in my eyes that there is naught but devotion and sympathy in my heart?"

"Yes," replied Madame Bonacieux; "and if you ask for my secrets I will tell them to you, but I may not tell you those of other people."

"Very good," said D'Artagnan, "I will discover them; since those secrets must exercise an influence over your life, they must become mine."

"Beware!" cried the young woman, with an accent which made D'Artagnan shudder in spite of himself. "Oh, do not meddle with what concerns me! I implore this in the name of the interest with which you inspire me and the service you have rendered me, and which I shall never forget. Have no more to do with me than if I never existed."

"And must Aramis do the same, madame?" asked D'Artagnan, nettled.

"I have told you that I do not know him."

"You do not know the man at whose shutter you knocked? I am not quite so credulous as that."

"Confess; it is to make me speak that you invent this personage."

"I invent nothing, madame, create nothing, but speak the truth."

"And you say that one of your friends lives in that house?"

"I say it, and I repeat it."

"All this will be cleared up later," murmured the young woman; "now silence."

"If you could see my heart," said D'Artagnan, "you would read there so much curiosity that you would have pity on me, and so much love that you would instantly gratify my curiosity. There is nothing to fear from those who love you."

"You talk very quickly of love, sir," said the young woman, shaking her head.

"Because I have fallen in love quickly and for the first time, and because I am not twenty years old."

The young woman glanced quickly at him.

"Listen; I am already on the scent," said D'Artagnan. "Three months ago I nearly had a duel with Aramis about a handkerchief similar to the one you showed just now to the woman who was in his house. A handkerchief with the same monogram."

"Sir," said the young woman, "I assure you that you are torturing me with these questions."

"But you, who are so prudent, madame, if you were arrested with this handkerchief, would it not compromise you?"

"Why so? the initials are mine, C.B.—Constance Bonacieux."

"Or, Camille de Bois-Tracy."

"Silence, sir; once more, silence! Ah, since the dangers that I run for myself do not stop you, think of those which you yourself may incur!"

"I?"

"Yes, you. There is danger of prison and danger to life in knowing me."

"Then I shall not leave you."

"Sir," said the young woman, imploring him and clasping her hands, "in the name of Heaven, in the name of the honour of a soldier, leave me. It is striking midnight, the hour I am expected."

"Madame," said the young man, bowing, "I can refuse you nothing; be contented, I am going away."

"You will not follow me?"

"I shall return home at once."

"Ah, I knew well that you were an honourable young man," cried Madame Bonacieux, holding out one hand to him, and placing the other on the knocker of the door.

D'Artagnan seized the hand held out to him and kissed it ardently.

"Ah! I would sooner never have seen you," cried D'Artagnan, with that bluntness which women prefer to mincing words, because it lays bare the mind and shows that reason has been mastered by feeling.

"Very well," cried Madame Bonacieux, in a voice almost caressing, and squeezing D'Artagnan's hand; "I cannot say as much as you do. I shall not go so far. What is lost to-day is not lost for the future. Who knows, if, one day, when I am free, I shall not satisfy your curiosity?"

"And will you make the same promise to my love?"

"Oh, I will enter into no engagement; that will depend on the feelings you inspire."

"Therefore, to-day, madame——"

"To-day, sir, I have only reached the point of gratitude. In the proper time and place I will remember all. Now, in the name of Heaven, leave me. I am already late."

"I am going; I believe in you. I desire to have all the merit of my devotion, even should that devotion be an act of stupidity. Adieu, madame, adieu."

And with a violent effort he released her hand and rushed away while Madame Bonacieux gave three slow knocks as previously at the shutter. On reaching the angle of the street, he turned round; the door was closed, and the pretty wife of the mercer had disappeared.

D'Artagnan continued his way. He had given his word not to play the spy upon Madame Bonacieux, and had his life depended upon it, he would have returned home as he had promised.

"Poor Athos!" he said, "he won't know what all this means. He will have fallen asleep while waiting for me. A woman in the apartment of Athos! After all, there was one in that of Aramis. It is all very strange, and I wonder how it will end."

"Badly, sir, badly," said a voice, which D'Artagnan recognized to be that of Planchet, for while soliloquizing thus he had reached his own door.

"How, badly? What do you mean, stupid?" asked D'Artagnan. "What has happened?"

"All sorts of misfortunes."

"What are they?"

"First of all, M. Athos has been arrested."

"Arrested! Athos! Why?"

"He was found here, and they mistook him for you."

"By whom was he arrested?"

"By the guard, which was summoned by the men in black whom you put to flight."

"Why did he not name himself? Why did he not say that he had nothing to do with this affair?"

"On the contrary, sir, he whispered to me, 'It is your master who requires his liberty for the moment, and not I, since he knows all, and I know nothing. They will think that he is arrested, and that will give him time; in three days I will say who I am, and they will be forced to release me.'"

"Bravo, Athos! noble heart!" murmured D'Artagnan, "I recognize you there. And what did the police do?"

"Four led him away—I don't know where. To the Bastille, perhaps. Two remained with the men in black, who searched the apartment, and took all your papers. When all was over, they went away, leaving the house empty and the door open."

"And Porthos and Aramis?"

"I could not find them, so they didn't come."

"But they may arrive at any moment. You told them I was expecting them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, don't stir from here; if they come, tell them what has happened, and that I expect them at the Pomme de Pin. Here there might be danger, for the house may be watched. I am going to M. de Tréville, to inform him of what has happened. You will remain here. You will not be frightened?"

"Never fear, sir," said Planchet; "you do not know me yet. I am brave when I set about it. The only difficulty I have is to set about it. Besides, I am a Picard."

"Then it is agreed," said D'Artagnan; "you will die rather than quit your post?"

"Yes, sir; there is nothing I will not do to prove my attachment to you."

"Good," said D'Artagnan to himself; "it seems that the method I employed with the fellow was a good one." And as fast as his legs could carry him, tired as he was from the day's exertions, D'Artagnan set off.

M. de Tréville was not at his *hôtel*. His company was on guard at the Louvre, and he was with his company. It was important to let M. de Tréville know what had passed. D'Artagnan determined to try to enter the Louvre. His uniform ought to be a passport, he thought. He made his way to the Pont Neuf, and was about to take the ferry-boat when he found that he had no money. At the top of the Rue Guénégaud he saw two persons issue from the Rue Dauphine, a woman and a man. The woman looked like Madame Bonacieux, and the man strikingly resembled Aramis. Besides, the woman wore the black mantle which D'Artagnan remembered outlined against the shutter and the man wore the uniform of a musketeer. The woman's hood was drawn over her face, and the man hid his with a handkerchief. This double precaution showed that they did not wish to be recognized. They crossed the bridge, and as this was D'Artagnan's way, he followed them. He had not gone twenty paces before he was convinced that the woman was Madame Bonacieux, and that the man was Aramis. At once all the

suspicions of jealousy awakened in his heart. He was doubly betrayed, both by his friend and by her he already loved as if she had been his mistress. Madame Bonacieux had sworn that she did not know Aramis, and here she was on his arm.

D'Artagnan did not reflect that he had known the mercer's pretty wife only three hours, that she owed him nothing but gratitude for having delivered her from the men in black, and that she had promised him nothing. The blood mounted to his head, and he determined to clear up the matter.

The young woman and the young man, perceiving that they were followed, had quickened their pace. D'Artagnan ran past them and returned to face them in front of the Samaritaine, where a lamp lighted up that part of the bridge.

"What do you want, sir?" asked the musketeer, with a foreign accent, which proved that D'Artagnan was wrong as concerned a part of his conjectures.

"It is not Aramis!" he cried.

"No, sir, it is not Aramis. By your exclamation I see that you have mistaken me for another, and I pardon you."

"You pardon me!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Yes," replied the stranger; "allow me to pass, since you have no business with me."

"You are right, sir, my business is not with you, but with this lady."

"With madame! you do not know her," said the stranger.

"You are mistaken, sir; I know her."

"Ah," said Madame Bonacieux in a tone of reproach, "you gave me your word as a soldier and your faith as a gentleman, and I relied upon it."

"And I, madame?" said D'Artagnan, much embarrassed; "you promised me!"

"Take my arm, madame," said the stranger, "and let us go on."

However, D'Artagnan, bewildered, thunderstruck by these happenings, remained with folded arms in front of the musketeer and Madame Bonacieux. The musketeer stepped forward and pushed D'Artagnan aside with his hand. D'Artagnan bounded back and drew his sword. At the same instant, and with the rapidity of lightning, the stranger drew his.

"In the name of Heaven, milord!" cried Madame Bonacieux, throwing herself between the two combatants and seizing their swords.

"Milord!" cried D'Artagnan, enlightened by a sudden idea. "Pardon, sir, but are you——"

"The Duke of Buckingham," said Madame Bonacieux in a low voice; "and now you can ruin us all."

"Milord, madame, a thousand pardons; but I love her, milord, and I was jealous; you know what it is to love, milord; pardon me, and say how I can lay down my life for your Grace."

"You are a gallant fellow," said Buckingham, holding out his hand, which D'Artagnan grasped respectfully. "You offer me your services, I accept them; follow us at twenty paces as far as the Louvre, and if anyone spies on us, kill him."

D'Artagnan placed his naked sword under his arm and executed to the letter the instructions of the noble and elegant minister of Charles I, following him and Madame Bonacieux to the Louvre. Fortunately, he had no occasion for showing his devotion, and the young woman and the handsome musketeer entered the Louvre by the wicket of the Rue de l'Échelle without being molested.

D'Artagnan at once proceeded to the cabaret of the Pomme de Pin, where he found Porthos and Aramis waiting for him. Without giving them any further explanation for the trouble he had caused them, he said, briefly, that he had concluded the affair alone.

And now, carried on as we are by our tale, let us leave our three friends to return home, and let us follow the Duke of Buckingham and his guide through the windings of the Louvre.

CHAPTER XII

GEORGE VILLIERS, DUKE OF BUCKINGHAM

MADAME BONACIEUX and the Duke entered the Louvre without difficulty; Madame Bonacieux was known to belong to the Queen; the Duke wore the uniform of the Musketeers, who were on guard. Besides, Germain was in the interest of the Queen, and if anything happened, Madame Bonacieux would be accused of having introduced her lover into the Louvre; that would be all. She took the crime on herself; her reputation would be gone, but of what value in the world was the reputation of a little mercer?

Once within the courtyard, the Duke and the young woman followed the wall for twenty-five paces, and then Madame Bonacieux pushed a little door which, open in the daytime, was usually closed at night; the door yielded, and they found themselves in

darkness. Madame Bonacieux, however, was well acquainted with this part of the Louvre. She closed the door behind her, took the Duke by the hand, felt her way to the stair, which they ascended. The Duke counted two flights. After passing along a gallery they descended a flight, went a few paces further, and then Madame Bonacieux inserted a key into a door which she opened, and pushed the Duke into an apartment lighted only by a night-lamp, saying, " Remain here, milord Duke. They will come " ; then she went out by the same door, which she locked ; so that the Duke found himself a prisoner.

However, isolated though he was, the Duke of Buckingham did not experience a moment of fear. One of the striking traits of his character was his love for the romantic. Brave, daring, enterprising, it was not the first time that he had risked his life in similar attempts ; he had learned that the pretended message from Anne of Austria—on the faith of which he had come to Paris—was a snare ; but, instead of returning to England, he had declared to the Queen that he would not leave without seeing her. The Queen had positively refused at first ; at last she had feared that the Duke in a state of exasperation would commit some act of folly. She had already decided to receive him, and to implore him to depart at once, when, on the very evening of this decision, Madame Bonacieux, who was to have fetched the Duke, was carried off. For two days it was not known what had become of her, and everything remained in suspense. But once free, and placed in communication with M. de la Porte, things had resumed their course ; and she had just accomplished the dangerous enterprise which, but for her arrest, would have been carried out three days sooner.

Buckingham, left alone, approached the looking-glass. The musketeers' uniform suited him well. He was then about thirty-five years old, and justly passed for the handsomest and most elegant man of France and England.

The favourite of two kings, rolling in wealth, all powerful in the kingdom which he upheaved at his fancy, and calmed at his caprice, George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, led one of those fabulous existences which remain through the course of centuries as if to astonish posterity. Certain of himself, convinced of his power, sure that the laws which governed other men could not affect him, he marched straight upon his goal, no matter how elevated or dazzling. It is thus that he had managed on several occasions to approach the haughty Anne of Austria, and to make himself loved by her.

At this moment a door hidden in the tapestry opened, and a woman appeared. Buckingham saw this apparition in the mirror and uttered a cry; it was the Queen.

Anne of Austria was then about twenty-six years of age; that is to say, she was in all the splendour of her beauty. Her carriage was that of a queen or a goddess. Her eyes, which sparkled like emeralds, were perfectly lovely, full of softness and majesty at the same time. Her mouth was small and her lips rosy; and although the underlip, like that of all the Princes of Austria, advanced a little, the smile was either exquisitely winning, or else disdainful to a degree. Her skin was quoted for its velvety softness; her hands and arms were of surprising beauty, and were sung by all the poets of the day as incomparable. Lastly, her hair, which, fair in her youth, had become chestnut, and which she wore curled and powdered, admirably set off her face, for which the rigid critic might have recommended less rouge, and the most exacting sculptor a more delicately chiselled nose.

Buckingham remained for a moment dazzled. Never had Anne of Austria appeared to him so lovely, in the midst of balls and *fêtes*, as she appeared at this moment, clothed in a robe of simple white satin, and accompanied by Doña Estefana, the only one of her Spanish ladies who had not been driven away by the jealousy of the King or the persecution of the Cardinal. Anne of Austria advanced two steps; Buckingham threw himself at her knees, and, before the Queen could hinder him, kissed the hem of her robe.

"Duke, you know already it was not I who wrote to you?"

"Yes, madame; yes, your Majesty," cried the Duke; "I know that I was a madman to suppose that the snow would become animated, or marble warm. But what would you? When one loves, one believes easily in love; besides, I have not lost everything by this voyage, since I see you."

"Yes, but you know why and how I see you: because, regardless of all my troubles, you obstinately remain in a city where you risk your life, and make me risk my honour: I see you that I may tell you that everything separates us—the sea, the enmity of two kingdoms, the sanctity of pledges. It is sacrilege to struggle against so many things, my lord. I see you, in short, to tell you we must see each other no more."

"Speak, madame; speak, Queen," said Buckingham; "the sweetness of your voice conceals the harshness of your words. You speak of sacrilege! But the sacrilege is in the separation of hearts which God formed for each other."

"My lord, you forget that I never told you that I loved you."

"Neither have you ever told me that you do not; and really, to address such words to me would be too deep ingratitude on the part of your Majesty. For where could you find a love equal to mine? a love which neither time nor absence nor despair can extinguish; a love which contents itself with a lost ribbon, a stray look, a passing word. It is three years, madame, since I beheld you for the first time; and for three years I have loved you thus. Shall I tell you how you were dressed the first time I saw you? Shall I detail all the ornaments of your toilette? I see you still: you were seated upon cushions, after the Spanish custom; you wore a robe of green satin embroidered with gold and silver; hanging sleeves fastened round your admirable arms with large diamonds; a close ruff; a little cap on your head, the same colour as your robe, ornamented with a heron's plume. I close my eyes, and I see you as you were then; I open them, and I see you as you are now—that is to say, a hundred times more lovely."

"What madness," murmured Anne of Austria, who had not the courage to be angry with the Duke for having so faithfully preserved her portrait in his heart, "what madness to nourish a useless passion with such remembrances!"

"And with what would you have me live? Remembrances are all that I have; they are my happiness, my treasure, my hope. Each time that I see you is another diamond enshrined in my heart; this is the fourth which you let fall, and which I pick up, for in three years, madame, I have seen you but four times; the first time as I described, the second time at the house of Madame de Chevreuse, the third time in the gardens of Amiens."

"Duke," said the Queen, blushing, "do not speak of that evening."

"Oh, on the contrary, let us speak of it, madame; it is the happiest and most brilliant evening of my life. Do you remember what a lovely night it was? How soft and perfumed was the air; how blue was the sky, and how studded with stars! Ah! that time, madame, I was able to remain alone with you for one instant; you were ready to tell me everything—the isolation of your life, the griefs of your heart. You leaned on my arm; I felt, as I bent down my head, your beautiful hair touch my face, and each time it touched me I trembled from head to foot. Oh, Queen! you do not know the heavenly bliss, the joy of paradise.

contained in such a moment! Take my wealth, my fortune, my glory, the remainder of my days, for such a moment and such a night! for that night, madame, that night you loved me—I swear it!"

"My lord, it is possible, yes, that the influence of the spot, that the charm of that lovely evening, that the fascination of your look, that those thousand circumstances which sometimes unite to ruin a woman may have gathered round me on that fatal evening; but, as you perceived, my lord, the Queen came to the rescue of the weakening woman; at the first word you presumed to utter, at the first liberty you attempted, I called."

"Oh, yes, yes, that is true, and the ordeal would have extinguished any love but mine—mine became only more ardent and more eternal. You thought to avoid me by returning to Paris; you thought that I would not dare to leave the treasure which my master had entrusted to my care. Ah! what matter to me all the treasures of the world and all the kings of the earth? A week afterward I returned; that time you had nothing to complain of, and you pardoned me on seeing me so submissive and repentant."

"Yes, but calumny laid hold of these follies, for which, as you know, my lord, I was in no way to blame. The King, excited by the Cardinal, made a great scandal. Madame de Vernet was dismissed; Peutange was exiled; Madame de Chevreuse fell into disgrace; and when you wished to return as ambassador to France, the King himself opposed it."

"Yes, and France will pay for this refusal with a war. I may no longer see you, madame. Well, you shall hear of me daily. What do you think is the reason for this expedition to Ré, and this Protestant League of La Rochelle which I propose?—The pleasure of seeing you. I have no hope of reaching Paris with my army; but this war will bring about peace, this peace will require a negotiator, and that negotiator will be me. It would be impossible to refuse to accept me. I shall come to Paris, I shall see you again, and I shall be happy for a moment. Thousands of men, it is true, will have paid for this happiness with their lives; but what matter, provided that I see you?"

"My lord, those proofs of love which you offer almost amount to crimes."

"Because you do not love me, madame; if you loved me, you would see things in a different light; if you loved me—oh, that would be too much happiness, and would drive me mad! Ah! Madame de Chevreuse, of whom you spoke just now, was less

cruel than you: Holland loved her, and she reciprocated his love."

"Madame de Chevreuse was not a queen," murmured Anne of Austria, conquered in spite of herself by the expression of a love so deep.

"You would love me, then, madame, if you were not one? You allow me to believe that it is the dignity of your rank alone which makes you cruel to me, and that if you had been Madame de Chevreuse poor Buckingham might have hoped? Thanks for those sweet words! Oh, my lovely Majesty, thanks a hundred times!"

"Ah, my lord, you misunderstand me."

"Silence! silence!" said the Duke; "I am so happy in my error, that it would be cruelty to destroy it. You told me yourself that I have been drawn into a snare in which I shall perhaps lose my life; it is strange, but for some time past I have had a presentiment that I am about to die."

The Duke smiled in a way which was both melancholy and charming.

"Oh, my God!" cried Anne of Austria, with an accent of terror, which betrayed that the interest she took in the Duke was greater than she liked to own.

"I did not say that to frighten you, madame, for I pay little attention to such absurd dreams. But the words that you have uttered—this hope that you have almost given me, were sufficient reward, even though this venture should cost me my life."

"Well," said Anne of Austria, "I also have presentiments and dreams; I dreamt that I saw you lying bleeding and wounded."

"In the left side, was it not, with a knife?" interrupted Buckingham.

"Yes, it was so, my lord—in the left side, with a knife. Who could have told you that I dreamed this? I confided it only to God in my prayers."

"I ask for nothing more, madame; you love me."

"I love you? I?"

"Yes, you. Would God send you the same dreams as to me if you did not love me? Should we have the same presentiments if our two existences were not united by the heart? You love me, O Queen, and you will mourn for me!"

"Oh, my God! my God!" cried Anne of Austria, "this is more than I can bear. In Heaven's name, leave me! I do not know whether I love you; but what I know is that I will not perjure myself. Take pity on me, then, and go. Oh, if you should

be wounded in France, if you should die in France, if I could suppose that your love for me were the cause of your death, I should never be consoled ; I should go mad. Go, then, I implore you."

" Oh, how beautiful you are thus, and how I love you ! " said Buckingham.

" Go, go, I implore you, and come back at some future time ; come back as ambassador, as minister, surrounded by guards who will defend you, and by servants who will watch over you. Then I shall not fear for your life, and I shall be happy to see you."

" Oh ! can it be true what you say ? "

" Yes."

" Well, give me a pledge of your indulgence, an object which belongs to you, and which will remind me that this is not a dream—something that you have worn, and that I may wear in my turn—a ring, a necklace, a chain."

" And you will go if I give you what you ask ? "

" Yes."

" Immediately ? "

" Yes."

" You will leave France and return to England ? "

" Yes ; I swear it."

" Wait, then, wait."

Anne of Austria withdrew and quickly returned from an inner apartment, bringing in her hand a little rosewood casket inlaid with gold and bearing her monogram.

" Take this, my lord, in memory of me."

Buckingham took the casket, and for a second time fell on his knee.

" You promised me that you would go," said the Queen.

" And I will keep my word. Your hand, madame, and I go."

Anne of Austria held out her hand, shutting her eyes, leaning with the other hand on Doña Estefana, for she felt that her strength was failing her.

Buckingham pressed her beautiful hand passionately to his lips, and then rising, said :

" Before six months I shall either be dead or you shall see me again, madame, even if I have to overturn the world."

Then, faithful to the promise he had given, he rushed from the apartment.

In the gallery he was met by Madame Bonacieux, who was

waiting for him, and who with the same precautions conducted him safely out of the Louvre.

CHAPTER XIII

M. BONACIEUX

AS the reader may have noticed, there was a personage involved in all these happenings in whom little interest has been shown, despite his precarious position; this was M. Bonacieux, the respectable victim of political and amorous intrigues. The police who had arrested him took him straight to the Bastille, where two guards seized hold of the mercer, made him cross a courtyard, and, opening a door, pushed him into a low room, which, in the way of furniture, had only a table, a chair, and a commissary. The commissary was seated on the chair, and busy writing at the table.

The two guards led the prisoner before the table, and, upon a sign from the commissary, retired out of hearing.

The commissary then raised his head to see with whom he had to deal. He was a man of forbidding countenance, with a pointed nose, high cheek-bones, eyes small, but sharp and inquisitive, the whole suggesting both the weazel and the fox.

He began by asking M. Bonacieux his name, age, and abode.

The accused replied that he was Jacques Michel Bonacieux, age fifty-one years, a retired mercer, and that he resided Rue de Fossoyeurs, No. 11.

The commissary then, instead of continuing to examine him, made a long speech about the danger of an obscure *bourgeois* meddling with public affairs. He added to this exordium some remarks on the power and the acts of the Cardinal, that incomparable minister, that conqueror of ministers past, and example for ministers to come, whose acts and power had never been thwarted with impunity.

After this second part of his discourse, fixing his falcon eye on poor Bonacieux, he called upon him to reflect on the gravity of his situation.

The reflections of the mercer were ready made. He cursed the moment when M. de la Porte took it into his head to marry him to his goddaughter, and especially the moment when that goddaughter was taken by the Queen to look after her linen. The character of Bonacieux was composed of excessive selfishness,

sordid avarice, and extreme cowardice. The love with which his young wife had inspired him was a secondary feeling. So Bonacieux's reflections did not take him long.

"But, sir," he replied coldly, "be persuaded that I know and appreciate, more than anyone, the merits of the incomparable Eminence by whom we have the honour to be governed."

"Really?" asked the commissary, with an air of doubt. "But, if it were so, why should you be at the Bastille?"

"It is quite impossible for me to say," replied Bonacieux, "seeing that I am ignorant of the reason myself; but assuredly it is not for having wittingly offended the Cardinal."

"However, you must have committed some crime since you are accused of high treason."

"Of high treason!" cried Bonacieux, terrified; "of high treason! And how can a poor mercer, who hates the Huguenots, and abhors the Spaniards, be accused of high treason? Reflect, sir, the thing is absolutely impossible."

"M. Bonacieux," said the commissary, looking at the accused as if his little eyes had the power of reading to the depths of the heart; "M. Bonacieux, you have a wife?"

"Yes, sir," said Bonacieux, trembling, and feeling that this was where matters were becoming involved; "at least, I had one."

"How? You had one! What have you done with her, if you haven't her now?"

"She has been carried off from me, sir."

"Carried off? Ah!"

Bonacieux felt by this "Ah!" that his position was getting more and more involved.

"And do you know the man who abducted her?"

"I think I know him."

"Who is he?"

"Remember that I merely have a suspicion, sir."

"Whom do you suspect? Come, answer frankly."

M. Bonacieux was in the greatest perplexity. Should he tell everything, or deny everything? By denying everything, they might suppose that he knew more than he wished to tell; by telling everything, he made a show of goodwill. He decided, then, to speak out.

"I suspect," he said, "a tall, dark man, who has the air of a great personage; he followed us several times after I had met my wife, at the wicket of the Louvre, to take her home."

The commissary appeared to be somewhat troubled.

"And his name?" he asked.

" His name I do not know ; but, were I to meet him, I should recognize him at once out of a thousand."

The brow of the commissary grew dark.

" You would recognize him, you say ? "

" That is to say," replied Bonacieux, who perceived that he was on dangerous ground ; " that is to say——"

" You have said that you could recognize him," said the commissary ; " that is sufficient for to-day. Before going any further, some one must be informed that you know the ravisher of your wife."

" But I did not say that I knew him. I said, on the contrary——"

" Take away the prisoner," said the commissary to the two guards.

" Where shall I take him ? " asked the warder.

" To a cell."

" Which ? "

" Anyone will do, provided it be safe," replied the commissary, with an indifference that horrified the poor Bonacieux.

" Alas ! " said he to himself, " my doom is at hand ! My wife must have committed some fearful crime. They take me for an accomplice, and I shall be punished with her. She must have confessed that she told me everything—a woman is so weak ! A cell—the first at hand ! A night is soon passed, and to-morrow —the wheel, the gallows ! Oh, my God, my God ! have pity on me ! "

Without paying any attention to the lamentations of Bonacieux, the two guards took hold of the prisoner and led him away, while the commissary hurriedly penned a letter for which his clerk waited.

Bonacieux did not close an eye ; not that his cell was too unpleasant, but because his anxiety was too great. He remained all night on his stool, starting at the least noise, and when the first rays of light penetrated into his chamber, the dawn seemed to him to have assumed a funereal hue.

Suddenly he heard the bolts drawn, and leaped up in terror. He thought they were coming to lead him to the scaffold. Therefore when, instead of the executioners, he saw the commissary and his clerk, he felt inclined to embrace them.

" Your affair is greatly complicated since yesterday evening, my good man," said the commissary ; " and I advise you to tell the whole truth, for your repentance can alone appease the wrath of the Cardinal."

" But I am quite ready to tell everything," cried Bonacieux; " at least, all I know."

" Where is your wife? first of all."

" I told you that she had been carried off."

" Yes; but since five o'clock yesterday evening, thanks to you, she has escaped."

" My wife escaped! Ah, the wretched woman! Sir, it is not my fault if she escaped."

" Why did you go to the apartment of M. d'Artagnan, with whom you had a long conference? "

" Ah, yes, sir; that is true; and I admit that I was wrong."

" What was the object of this visit? "

" To ask him to aid me to find my wife. I thought that I had the right to go after my wife. It appears that I made a mistake. I humbly crave pardon."

" What did M. d'Artagnan reply? "

" He promised me his aid, but I soon perceived that he was betraying me."

" You are trying to hoodwink us! M. d'Artagnan made a compact with you, in virtue of which he put to flight the police who had arrested your wife, and placed her beyond their reach."

" M. d'Artagnan carried off my wife! What is this that you tell me! "

" Fortunately, M. d'Artagnan is in our hands, and you shall be confronted with him."

" Indeed, I shall be very glad."

" Let M. d'Artagnan enter," said the commissary.

The two guards led in Athos.

" M. d'Artagnan," said the commissary, addressing Athos, " tell me what passed between this man and you."

" But," cried Bonacieux, " that is not M. d'Artagnan."

" How? Not M. d'Artagnan! " exclaimed the commissary.

" Not the least in the world," said Bonacieux.

" What, then, is his name? "

" I cannot say; I do not know him."

" How? You don't know him? "

" No."

" You have never seen him before? "

" Yes; but I don't know his name."

" Your name? " asked the commissary.

" Athos," replied the musketeer.

" But that is not the name of a man; it is the name of a mountain! " exclaimed the commissary, who began to lose his head.

" It is my name," calmly answered Athos.

" But you said that you were called D'Artagnan."

" I ? "

" Yes ; you."

" You mean that they said to me, ' You are M. d'Artagnan ! ' I replied, ' You believe so ? ' My guards declared that they were sure of it. I did not wish to annoy them : besides, I might be mistaken."

" Sir, you insult the majesty of the law ! "

" Not in the least," replied Athos quietly.

" You are M. d'Artagnan ! "

" You see that you say so again."

" But ! " exclaimed M. Bonacieux, in his turn, " I tell you that there can be no doubt ! M. d'Artagnan is my lodger, and consequently, although he does not pay his rent, or rather for that very reason, I ought to know him. M. d'Artagnan is a young man of twenty at the most, while this gentleman is at least thirty. M. d'Artagnan is in the Guards of M. des Essarts, and this gentleman is in the Musketeers of M. de Tréville. Look at his uniform ! "

" That's true," murmured the commissary.

At this moment the door was thrown open, and a messenger handed a letter to the commissary.

" Oh, the wretched woman ! " exclaimed the commissary.

" How ? Of whom are you speaking ? Not of my wife, I hope ? "

" On the contrary ; it is about her. Now you are in a mess."

" How so ? " cried the exasperated mercer. " Kindly tell me, sir, how my position can be affected by what my wife does while I am in prison."

" Because she is following out the infernal plan previously arranged between you."

" I swear to you, sir, that you are entirely mistaken. That I know nothing in the world of what my wife is doing or has done ; if she has committed any follies, I renounce her and curse her."

" Pardon me," said Athos to the commissary ; " if you require me no longer here, send me away. Your M. Bonacieux is something of a bore."

" Take the prisoners back to their cells," said the commissary, " and let them be guarded more strictly than ever."

" But," said Athos, with his habitual coolness, " if your business is with M. d'Artagnan, I hardly see how I can take his place."

"Do what I said," cried the commissary; "and solitary confinement, mind."

Athos followed his guard, shrugging his shoulders; and M. Bonacieux, uttering lamentations, was taken back to the cell where he had passed the night. Here he remained the whole day long weeping like the mercer he was. Toward nine in the evening, as he was going to get into bed, he heard steps in the corridor. These steps approached his cell; the door opened; the guards appeared.

"Follow me," said a police officer.

"Follow you," cried Bonacieux, "at this hour! and where?"

"Where we have orders to take you."

"But that is not an answer."

"But it is the only one we can give you."

"Ah, my God!" murmured the poor mercer, "this time it is all over"; and he followed the guards without resistance along the same gallery and courtyard he had previously passed through.

At the gate of the courtyard he found a carriage surrounded by four guards on horseback. They made him get in; the police officer seated himself beside him, the door was locked, and the pair found themselves in a travelling prison.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MAN OF MEUNG

THE carriage turned into the Rue des Bons Enfants, and pulled up before a low door. The door opened, and two guards received Bonacieux in their arms: they pushed him into an alley, made him ascend a staircase, and left him in an antechamber.

Then a well-looking officer opened the door, still conversing with some one in the adjoining room, and then, turning toward the prisoner, said:

"It is you who are called Bonacieux?"

"Yes, sir," stammered the mercer, more dead than alive; "at your service."

"Come in," said the officer.

He made way to allow the mercer to pass. Bonacieux obeyed without replying, and entered the room where it appeared that he was expected.

It was a large cabinet, with walls well furnished with defensive and offensive weapons, close and stifling, for there was already a fire, although it was hardly the end of September. The middle of the apartment was occupied by a large square table, covered with books and papers, on which was unrolled an immense plan of the city of La Rochelle.

Standing before the chimneypiece was a man of middle height, of haughty mien, with piercing eyes, a broad forehead, a thin face, which appeared all the longer owing to a short pointed beard which he wore as well as moustaches. Although this man was hardly thirty-seven, hair, moustache, and beard were getting grey. Except that the sword was wanting, this man had all the appearance of a soldier ; his buff boots, with their slight coating of dust, showed that he had been on horseback. This man was Armand Jean Duplessis, Cardinal de Richelieu, not as he has been represented to us, broken down with age, suffering like a martyr, his body shattered, the voice gone, buried in an armchair as in an anticipated tomb, living only by the force of his genius, and only keeping up his struggle against Europe by the constant application of his mind ; but such as he was at this period—that is to say, a bold and skilful horseman, already weak of body, but sustained by that moral strength which made him one of the most remarkable men who ever existed, preparing to drive the English from the island of Ré, and to lay siege to La Rochelle.

At first sight, nothing denoted the Cardinal, and it was impossible for those who did not know him to guess in whose presence they were.

The poor mercer remained standing at the door while the eyes of the personage we have just described were steadily fixed upon him.

" We have here this Bonacieux ? " he asked after a moment's silence.

" Yes, Monseigneur," replied the officer.

" Very well ; give me these papers and leave us."

The officer obeyed, and bowing to the ground, left the room.

Bonacieux recognized in these papers the examination at the Bastille. At the expiration of ten minutes' reading and ten seconds' examination the Cardinal had made up his mind. " That head of his never conspired," he murmured ; " but no matter, let us see."

" You are accused of high treason," the Cardinal said slowly.

" So I have already been informed, Monseigneur," cried

Bonacieux, employing the title he had heard given by the officer ; " but I am innocent."

The Cardinal repressed a smile.

" You have conspired with your wife, with Madame de Chevreuse, and with the Duke of Buckingham."

" I admit, Monseigneur, that I have heard those names pronounced by her."

" And upon what occasion ? "

" She said that Cardinal de Richelieu had enticed the Duke of Buckingham to Paris, to work his ruin, and that of the Queen."

" She said that ? " exclaimed the Cardinal, with violence.

" Yes, Monseigneur ; but I told her that she was wrong to make such assertions, and that his Eminence was incapable——"

" Hold your tongue ; you are a fool," said the Cardinal.

" That is just what my wife replied, Monseigneur."

" Do you know who carried off your wife ? "

" No, Monseigneur."

" But you have your suspicions ? "

" Yes, Monseigneur ; but my suspicions appeared to annoy the commissary—a most amiable man !—and I have discarded them."

The Cardinal repressed a second smile.

" Therefore you do not know what has become of your wife since her flight ? "

" No, Monseigneur ; but she must have returned to the Louvre."

" At one this morning she had not yet returned."

" Oh, my God ! what can have become of her ? "

" We shall know, rest assured. Nothing remains hidden from the Cardinal. The Cardinal knows everything."

" In that case, Monseigneur, do you think that the Cardinal will consent to tell me where my wife is ? "

" Perhaps ; but you must first confess all you know about the relations of your wife with Madame de Chevreuse."

" But, Monseigneur, I know nothing of that ; I have never seen her."

" When you went to fetch your wife from the Louvre, did she return straight with you ? "

" Hardly ever ; she had business with linen-drapers, to whose houses I took her."

" And how many linen-drapers were there ? "

" Two, Monseigneur."

" Where do they live ? "

" 25, Rue de Vaugirard, and 75, Rue de la Harpe."

" That will do," said the Cardinal, who rang a silver bell. The officer entered. " Go," he said, in a low voice, " and fetch Rochefort ; let him come directly, if he has returned."

" The Count is there, and desires to speak without delay to your Eminence."

" Let him come in," said Richelieu quickly.

The officer darted from the apartment with that rapidity with which the servants of the Cardinal were in the habit of obeying him.

" To your Eminence ! " murmured Bonacieux, rolling his eyes wildly.

Five seconds had hardly elapsed since the departure of the officer, when the door opened, and the new personage appeared.

" It is he ! " cried Bonacieux.

" Who ? " asked the Cardinal.

" The man who carried off my wife."

The Cardinal rang a second time ; the officer reappeared.

" Take that man back to his warders until I send for him."

" No, Monseigneur ; no, it is not he," cried Bonacieux ; " I was mistaken. It was some one else, not at all like him ! This gentleman is an honest man."

" Take away that dolt ! " said the Cardinal.

The officer took Bonacieux by the arm and led him into the anteroom.

The new personage who had just made his appearance followed Bonacieux impatiently with his eyes until he had left the room, and when the door was closed :

" They have seen each other," he said, approaching the Cardinal eagerly.

" Who ? " asked his Eminence. " The Queen and the Duke ? "

" Yes. At the Louvre."

" And who told you ? "

" Madame de Lannoy, who is entirely at the service of your Eminence, as you know."

" How did it happen ? "

" At half-past twelve the Queen was in her bedroom with her women, when a handkerchief was handed to her from the woman who keeps the linen."

" And after ? "

" The Queen immediately displayed great emotion, and grew pale under her rouge."

" And then—then ? "

"However, she rose, and said with a trembling voice, 'Ladies, wait ten minutes for me, until I return.' Then she went into her alcove."

"Why did not Madame de Lannoy warn you directly?"

"There was nothing certain as yet; besides, the Queen had told her ladies to wait, and she could not disobey."

"And how long did the Queen remain absent?"

"Three-quarters of an hour."

"Did none of her women accompany her?"

"Doña Estefana alone."

"And she afterward returned?"

"Yes; but to take a little rosewood casket."

"And did she bring back the casket when she returned again?"

"No."

"Did Madame de Lannoy know what was in it?"

"Yes; the diamond aiguillettes which his Majesty gave to the Queen."

"Now, do you know where the Duchesse de Chevreuse and the Duke were hiding?"

"No, Monseigneur; my agents have not been able to find out."

"Well, I know."

"You, Monseigneur?"

"Yes; or at least I have a suspicion. One in the Rue de Vaugirard, No. 25; and the other in the Rue de la Harpe, No. 75."

"Does your Eminence wish me to arrest them both?"

"It is too late; they will have flown."

"No matter, we can make sure."

"Take ten men of my Guard, and search the houses."

Rochefort rushed from the apartment.

The Cardinal, left alone, rang the bell a third time.

The same officer reappeared.

"Bring back the prisoner," said the Cardinal.

Bonacieux was once more introduced, and the officer withdrew.

"You have deceived me," said the Cardinal severely.

"I?" cried Bonacieux. "I deceive your Eminence?"

"Your wife did not go to the Rue de Vaugirard, and the Rue de la Harpe, to see linen-drapers."

"And who, then? merciful God!"

"The Duchesse de Chevreuse and the Duke of Buckingham."

"Yes," said Bonacieux, thinking hard, "that must be it. Your Eminence is right. I often said to my wife that it was astonishing

that linen-drapers should live in such houses, without signs, and each time she burst out laughing. Ah, Monseigneur," continued Bonacieux, throwing himself at the feet of his Eminence ; " ah, you are indeed the Cardinal, the great Cardinal, the man whom every one reveres ! "

The Cardinal, no matter how trifling the triumph gained over so vulgar a being as Bonacieux, enjoyed it for a moment ; then, as if a new idea had flashed across his mind, a smile curled his lip, and holding out his hand :

" Rise, my friend," he said ; " you are an honest fellow. And as you have been unjustly suspected, you must be indemnified. Take this sack of a hundred pistoles."

" Oh, Monseigneur ! "

" *Au revoir*, M. Bonacieux ; *au revoir*."

And the Cardinal made a motion with his hand, to which Bonacieux replied by bowing to the ground. When he reached the antechamber, the Cardinal heard him shouting, " Vive Monseigneur ! Vive his Eminence ! "

The Cardinal smiled as he listened to this enthusiastic manifestation on the part of M. Bonacieux.

" That man, henceforward, will be ready to die for me," he said.

And the Cardinal began to examine, with the greatest attention, the plan of La Rochelle, tracing with a pencil the line of the famous dyke which, eighteen months later, was to close the port to the garrison.

As he was in the midst of his strategic meditations, the door opened, and Rochefort re-entered.

" Well," said he, " a young woman of about twenty-six, and a man of about thirty-five, lodged, the one four days, and the other five, in the houses indicated by your Eminence ; but the woman left last night, and the man this morning."

" It was they ! " exclaimed the Cardinal, looking at his clock. " It is too late to run after them. The Duchess is at Tours, and the Duke at Boulogne. It is in London that we must overtake them."

" What are the orders of your Eminence ? "

" Not a word of what has passed. Let the Queen remain in perfect security ; she must not suspect that we know her secret ; let her believe that we are trying to discover some conspiracy. Send me the Keeper of the Seals, Séguier."

" And that man, what has your Eminence done with him ? "

" What man ? " asked the Cardinal.

"That Bonacieux."

"All that could be done with him. I have made him a spy on his wife."

The Count bowed like a man who recognized the superiority of his master and retired.

Left alone, the Cardinal seated himself once more, wrote a letter, sealed it with his private seal, and rang. The officer entered for the fourth time.

"Send Vitray here," he said; "and tell him to prepare for a journey."

A moment later, the man he had asked for was before him, booted and spurred.

"Vitray," he said, "you must set off at full speed for London. You will not stop a moment on the road. You will hand this letter to Milady. Here is an order for two hundred pistoles. You shall have as much again if you return in six days and if you have rightly accomplished your mission."

The messenger, without replying, bowed, took the letter and the order, and left.

This is what the letter contained:

MILADY,

Be present at the first ball to which the Duke of Buckingham goes. He will wear twelve diamond aiguillettes on his doublet; get near him and cut off two. As soon as they are in your possession, inform me.

CHAPTER XV

MEN OF GOWN AND MEN OF SWORD

THE day after these events had taken place, Athos not having reappeared, M. de Tréville was informed of his disappearance by D'Artagnan and Porthos. As for Aramis, he had asked for a furlough of five days, and was at Rouen, they said, for family affairs.

M. de Tréville was the father of his soldiers. The humblest and least known among them, as soon as he wore the uniform of the company, was as sure of his aid and support as if he were his brother.

He at once went to the *Lieutenant Criminel*, and it soon appeared that Athos had been sent to For-l'Evêque.

Athos had declared that his name was not D'Artagnan, that he

knew neither Monsieur nor Madame Bonacieux; that he had never spoken to either of them; that he had arrived about ten o'clock to pay D'Artagnan a visit, but that up to that moment he had remained with M. de Tréville, with whom he had dined; that twenty witnesses could attest this, and, among others, the Duc de la Trémouille.

The second commissary was as much astonished as the first by this firm and simple declaration. As a gentleman of the gown he wished to revenge himself on a gentleman of the sword, but the name of M. de Tréville, and that of M. de la Trémouille, made him hesitate.

Athos was also sent to the Cardinal, but unfortunately the Cardinal was at the Louvre. This was precisely the moment when M. de Tréville, leaving For-l'Evêque, arrived at his Majesty's. As Captain of the Musketeers, M. de Tréville had his entry at all hours.

It is well known what prejudices the King had against the Queen—prejudices kept alive by the Cardinal, who, in the matter of intrigue, feared women much more than men. They were largely due to the friendship of Anne of Austria with Madame de Chevreuse. These two women gave him more anxiety than the wars with Spain, the quarrels with England, and the embarrassments of the exchequer. In his eyes, and to his mind, Madame de Chevreuse served the Queen, not only in her political, but what irritated him more, in her love intrigues.

At the first word from the Cardinal, that Madame de Chevreuse, exiled to Tours, had passed five days in Paris, outwitting the police, the King had flown into a violent passion. Capricious and unfaithful, the King desired to be called "Louis the Just," and "Louis the Chaste," epithets which posterity will have some difficulty in understanding. But when the Cardinal added that Madame de Chevreuse had come to Paris to renew her intrigues with the Queen, and that at the very moment he was about to seize the threads of this mysterious affair, a musketeer had dared to interrupt the course of justice by falling, sword in hand, on worthy men of the law commissioned to unravel the affair, and lay it before the King, Louis XIII could no longer contain himself: he took a step in the direction of the Queen's apartment, with that pale and mute indignation which, when it burst forth, led this Prince to commit the coldest cruelties.

And yet, in all this, the name of Buckingham had not yet been mentioned by the Cardinal. It was then that M. de Tréville entered.

Warned of what had happened by the presence of the Cardinal

and by the King's black looks, M. de Tréville felt himself as strong as Samson in the presence of the Philistines.

Louis XIII was placing his hand on the handle of the door when, on hearing M. de Tréville enter, he turned round.

" You come at the right time, sir," said the King, who, when in a passion, could not dissemble ; " and I hear fine things of your musketeers."

" And I," said M. de Tréville coolly, " I have fine things to tell your Majesty about your gentlemen of the gown."

" What are you pleased to say ? " asked the King, haughtily.

" I have the honour to inform your Majesty," continued M. de Tréville in the same tone, " that a party of procurators, commissaries, and police agents, estimable gentlemen, but most hostile to the uniform, have permitted themselves to arrest one of my musketeers, rather of yours, Sire, a man of irreproachable conduct, and of almost illustrious reputation, who is favourably known to your Majesty—M. Athos."

" Athos ! " said the King mechanically ; " yes, I know that name."

" M. Athos had gone to visit one of his friends, then absent, a young Béarnais, a cadet in the Guards of your Majesty, attached to the company of Des Essarts ; but he had hardly installed himself when a party of bailiffs and soldiers laid siege to the house, broke open the doors——"

" M. de Tréville does not say," interposed the Cardinal, with great calm, " that this innocent musketeer, this gallant man, an hour before, struck with his sword four agents sent by me to enquire into an affair of the greatest importance."

" I defy your Eminence to prove it ! " exclaimed De Tréville, with his Gascon frankness and military bluntness ; " for one hour before, M. Athos, who—I confide it to your Majesty—is a man of the highest birth, did me the honour, after dining with me, to remain talking in my *hôtel* with the Duc de la Trémouille and the Comte de Chalus."

The King looked at the Cardinal.

" A report was made," replied the Cardinal, " by the agents ill-treated, and I have the honour to present it to your Majesty."

" If his Eminence suspects one of my musketeers," said Tréville, " the justice of the Cardinal is well enough known to allow me to ask for an inquiry."

" In the house where this affair took place," continued the Cardinal, " there lodges, I believe, a Béarnais, a friend of the musketeer."

" Yes, your Eminence, that is the case."

" Do you not suspect this young man of having given bad advice——"

" To M. Athos ? to a man double his age ? " interrupted M. de Tréville ; " no, Monseigneur. Besides, M. d'Artagnan passed the evening with me."

" Why ! " said the Cardinal, " did every one spend the evening with you ? "

" Does your Eminence doubt my word ? " said De Tréville, red with anger.

" God forbid ! " said the Cardinal ; " but at what hour was he with you ? "

" Oh ! that I can tell your Eminence ; for as he entered I remarked that it was half-past nine by the clock, although I thought it was later."

" And at what hour did he leave ? "

" At half-past ten ; an hour after the event."

" But," said the Cardinal, who in no way suspected the loyalty of De Tréville, and who felt that, after all, victory was escaping him ; " but Athos was captured in this house in the Rue des Fossageurs."

" Is it forbidden for one friend to visit another ? "

" Yes, when the house in which he fraternizes is under suspicion."

" This house is suspected, Tréville," said the King. " You were not aware of that ? "

" I was ignorant of that fact, Sire. At all events, I deny that the portion inhabited by M. d'Artagnan is suspected ; for I can assure you, Sire, that your Majesty has no more faithful servant, nor the Cardinal a more fervent admirer."

" Was it not D'Artagnan who wounded Jussac in that unfortunate encounter near the Carmes-Déchaussés ? " asked the King, looking at the Cardinal, who flushed with annoyance.

" Yes, Sire, yes. Your Majesty has a good memory."

" Come, what shall we decide ? " asked the King.

" That concerns your Majesty more than me," said the Cardinal. " Their guilt seems patent."

" And I deny it," said De Tréville. " But his Majesty has judges who will decide."

" That's it," said the King. " Let us send the case before the judges ; it is their business."

" Only," added De Tréville, " it is very sad that in these unfortunate times the purest life and the most incontestable virtue

do not exempt a man from infamy and persecution. The army will be little pleased, I can answer for it, at being exposed to rigorous treatment on account of police affairs."

The speech was imprudent, but M. de Tréville knew what he was doing. He desired an explosion, because the mine creates fire, and the fire creates light.

"Police affairs!" cried the King; "what do you know about that, sir? Attend to your musketeers, and don't bother me. To hear you speak, it would appear that if a musketeer has the misfortune to be arrested, France is in danger. Why, what a fuss about a musketeer! I will have ten arrested, *ventrebleu!* even an hundred; the whole company! and I won't have a word said about it."

"Since your Majesty suspects them," said M. de Tréville, "the musketeers are guilty; therefore you see me, Sire, quite prepared to give up my sword; for, after having accused my soldiers, the Cardinal will, I have no doubt, end by accusing me; it would be better, therefore, that I should constitute myself prisoner with M. Athos, who has already been arrested, and with M. d'Artagnan, who no doubt will be."

"Gascon, will you have done?" said the King.

"Sire," replied De Tréville, "order the release of my musketeer, or let him be tried."

"He shall be tried," said the Cardinal.

"Well, so much the better, for in that case I shall ask permission of his Majesty to plead for him."

The King feared an outburst.

"If his Eminence," he said, "had not personal motives——"

The Cardinal saw what the King was coming to.

"Pardon," said he, "but since your Majesty sees in me a prejudiced judge, I withdraw."

"Come," said the King, "will you swear to me by my father that M. Athos was with you during the event, and took no part in it?"

"By your glorious father and by yourself, who are what I most love and venerate on earth, I swear it."

"Reflect, Sire," said the Cardinal, "if we release the prisoner we shall never learn the truth."

"M. Athos will be always there ready to answer the men of the gown when they wish to examine him. He will not desert, Cardinal."

"Surely he will not desert," said the King; "he will always be found, as M. de Tréville says. Besides," he added, lowering his

voice and looking at the Cardinal with a suppliant air, "let us make them feel they are secure; that will be good policy."

This 'policy' of Louis XIII made Richelieu smile.

"Give your orders, Sire," he said, "the right to pardon is yours."

"The right of pardon applies only to the guilty," said De Tréville, "and my musketeer is innocent. It is not pardon that I ask, but justice."

"And he is at For-l'Evêque?" said the King.

"Yes, Sire, in solitary confinement, like the basest criminal."

"*Diable!*" muttered the King; "what must be done?"

"Sign the order for his liberation and that will be the end of it," said the Cardinal; "I think, with your Majesty, that the guarantee of M. de Tréville is more than sufficient."

De Tréville bowed, with a feeling of joy not unmixed with fear; he would have preferred the obstinate resistance of the Cardinal to this sudden yielding.

The King signed the order of release, which De Tréville immediately took away. As he was leaving, the Cardinal smiled in a friendly way, and said to the King: "Perfect harmony reigns between the chiefs and soldiers among your musketeers, Sire, which is profitable for the service and does honour to all."

"He will play me a nasty trick soon," thought De Tréville. "But let us make haste, for the King may change his mind, and it is more difficult to send a man back to the Bastille or For-l'Evêque than to keep him a prisoner when there."

M. de Tréville made a triumphal entry into For-l'Evêque and delivered his musketeer, whose peaceful indifference had not deserted him.

Then the first time he saw D'Artagnan again he said:

"You have had a narrow escape. The wound you inflicted on Jussac has been paid for. There remains that of Bernajoux."

M. de Tréville was quite right to distrust the Cardinal, and to think that all was not ended, for the Captain of the Musketeers had hardly closed the door behind him when his Eminence said:

"Now that we are alone, we will talk seriously, if it please your Majesty. Sire, the Duke of Buckingham has been in Paris for five days, and left only this morning."

CHAPTER XVI

THE KEEPER OF THE SEALS

IT is impossible to form an idea of the impression created by these few words on Louis XIII. He grew red and pale alternately, and the Cardinal saw at a glance that he had reconquered all the ground which he had lost.

"The Duke of Buckingham in Paris!" exclaimed the King; "and what did he come to do?"

"No doubt to conspire with your enemies, the Huguenots and the Spaniards."

"No, *pardieu*, no! To conspire against my honour with Madame de Chevreuse, Madame de Longueville, and the Condés."

"Oh! Sire, what an idea! The Queen is too virtuous, and loves your Majesty too much."

"Woman is weak, Cardinal, and as for loving me much, my opinion has long been formed with regard to that love."

"I maintain, none the less," said the Cardinal, "that the Duke came to Paris for political purposes."

"And I am sure that he came for something else; but if the Queen be guilty, let her tremble."

"Ah!" said the Cardinal, "loath though I am to entertain the idea of such treachery, now I come to think of it, Madame de Lannoy, whom I have examined several times, told me this morning that the night before last her Majesty sat up very late, that she cried a good deal this morning, and spent the day in writing."

"No doubt to him," said the King. "Cardinal, you think, then, like me, that she deceives me?"

"I believe that the Queen conspires against the power of the King; but I did not say against his honour."

"And I say against both. I tell you that the Queen does not love me. I tell you that she loves that infamous Buckingham. Why did you not have him arrested while he was in Paris?"

"Arrest the Duke! Arrest the Prime Minister of Charles I! Could you dream of it, Sire? What a scandal! And then, if the suspicions of your Majesty had some foundation, which I continue to doubt, what a terrible exposure!"

"But as he behaved like a vagrant or a thief, you should have——"

Louis XIII checked himself, frightened at what he was going to

say ; while Richelieu, stretching out his neck, awaited in vain the word which remained on the lips of the King.

" I should have ? "

" Nothing," said the King, " nothing. But while he was in Paris, you did not lose sight of him ? "

" No, Sire."

" Where did he lodge ? "

" Rue de la Harpe."

" And are you sure that he and the Queen did not see each other ? "

" I believe the Queen to be too much attached to her duties, Sire."

" But they have corresponded ; it was to him that the Queen wrote to-day. I must have those letters."

" But, Sire——"

" Cardinal, you have heard me. I must have those letters."

" The only way would be to entrust this duty to the Keeper of the Seals, Séguier. The matter comes within his province."

" Let him be sent for at once."

" He ought to be at my *hôtel*, for I begged him to call, and when I came to the Louvre I left word for him to wait."

" Send for him instantly."

" The orders of your Majesty shall be executed, but——"

" But what ? "

" But the Queen may refuse to obey."

" To obey—my orders ? "

" Yes, if she is not aware that these orders come from the King."

" Well, so that she may have no doubt, I will go and inform her myself."

" Your Majesty will not forget that I have done all in my power to prevent a rupture."

" Yes, I know that you are very indulgent to the Queen, too indulgent, perhaps ; we shall speak of that later."

And Louis XIII, opening the door, entered the gallery leading to the apartments of Anne of Austria.

The Queen was in the midst of her women. Her thoughts, gilded though they were by a last gleam of love, were nevertheless sad. Anne of Austria, deprived of the confidence of her husband, pursued by the hatred of the Cardinal, who would not pardon her for having repulsed his advances, having before her eyes the example of the Queen Mother, who had been tortured by this hatred all her life—although Marie de Medici, if one is to believe

the memoirs of the times, had begun by according to the Cardinal what Anne of Austria always refused—Anne of Austria had seen all her most devoted friends and servants fall around her. Madame de Chevreuse and Madame de Vernet were exiled, and La Porte did not conceal from his mistress that he expected to be arrested at any moment.

It was while she was plunged in these gloomy reflections that the door opened and the King entered.

All the ladies rose, and there was a deep silence.

The King made no show of politeness : stopping in front of the Queen :

" Madame," he said in an angry voice, " you are about to receive the visit of the Chancellor, who will communicate to you certain matters with which I have charged him."

The unfortunate Queen, who was constantly threatened with divorce, with exile, and even with being brought to trial, grew pale, and could not help saying, " But why this visit, Sire ? What can the Chancellor have to say to me that your Majesty cannot say yourself ? "

The King turned upon his heel without replying, and almost at the same moment the Captain of the Guards announced the visit of the Chancellor. The King disappeared by another door.

The Chancellor entered half smiling, half blushing.

The Queen was still standing when he entered ; but she no sooner perceived him than she seated herself in an armchair, and made a sign to her women to resume their seats.

" What do you want, sir ? " asked Anne of Austria in a most haughty tone.

" To make a perquisition into your papers, madame, in the name of the King, and with all due respect to your Majesty."

" How, sir, a perquisition ? This is infamous."

" Pardon me, madame, but I am simply the instrument used by the King. Did not his Majesty prepare you for this visit ? "

" Search then, sir ; it appears that I am a criminal. Estefana, give the keys of my tables and desks."

The Chancellor, as a matter of form, visited these pieces of furniture, but he well knew that it was not in these that the Queen had placed the important letter she had written during the day.

When the Chancellor had looked through all the drawers, it became necessary, despite his hesitation, to bring the matter to a termination by searching the Queen herself. The Chancellor therefore approached Anne of Austria, and in the most embarrassed manner said :

" And now it remains for me to make the chief perquisition."

" Which ? " asked the Queen, who did not, or rather would not, understand.

" His Majesty is certain that a letter was written by you to-day ; he knows that it has not been despatched. This letter is neither in the table nor the desk."

" Dare you lay your hand upon your Queen ? " said Anne of Austria, drawing herself up to her full height and fixing her eyes on the Chancellor in a manner almost threatening.

" I am the faithful subject of the King, madame, and all that his Majesty orders I will do."

" Well, it is true," said Anne of Austria, " and the spies of the Cardinal have served him well. I did write a letter to-day ; it is not gone. The letter is there."

And the Queen placed her fair hand on her bosom.

" Then give me that letter, madame," said the Chancellor.

" I will give it to the King alone, sir."

" If the King had wished you to hand him the letter, he would have asked for it himself."

" Well ? "

" It is I who have been charged to take it from you."

" What do you mean ? "

" That my orders go a long way, madame, and that I am authorized to search for the letter, even on the person of your Majesty."

" What an horror ! " cried the Queen.

" Will you, then, madame, facilitate matters ? "

" Do you know, sir, that this conduct is a piece of infamous violence ? "

" The King commands, madame, excuse me."

" I will not tolerate this ; no, no, I will sooner die ! " cried the Queen, whose Spanish and Austrian blood was roused.

The Chancellor bowed deeply, and then, with the evident intention of accomplishing his mission, he approached Anne of Austria, in whose eyes were to be seen welling tears of rage.

The Queen, as we have said, was extremely beautiful, so that the Chancellor's task could be considered a delicate one, but so jealous was the King of Buckingham, that he was no longer jealous of anyone else.

The Chancellor made up his mind and stretched out his hand in the direction of the place where the Queen had confessed that the letter was to be found.

Anne of Austria took a step back and grew pale as death ;

then, supporting herself with her left hand on a table, she drew forth the letter from her bosom and handed it to the Chancellor.

"Here, sir, is the letter," cried the Queen, in a broken and trembling voice; "take it, and relieve me of your odious presence."

The Chancellor, who on his side trembled with an emotion easily to be conceived, took the letter, bowed to the ground, and retired.

The door had hardly closed when the Queen fell half fainting into the arms of her women.

The Chancellor carried the letter to the King, who took it with a trembling hand, grew very pale, opened it slowly, then, seeing by the first words that it was addressed to the King of Spain, read it rapidly. It was a plan of attack against the Cardinal. The Queen implored her brother and the Emperor of Austria to make a pretended declaration of war against France, and to impose as a condition of peace the dismissal of the Cardinal, whose policy it was to abase the house of Austria. Of love there was not a single word.

The King, filled with joy, asked if the Cardinal was still at the Louvre, and was informed that his Eminence awaited the orders of his Majesty. The King went to him at once.

"Duke," he said, "you were right, and it is I who was wrong; the intrigue is wholly political, and there was no mention of love in the letter. On the other hand, there is a good deal about you."

The Cardinal took the letter and read it with great attention.

"Well, your Majesty," he said, "you see to what lengths my enemies go; they threaten you with two wars unless you dismiss me. I should yield to such powerful influence were I in your place. On my side, I should be only too glad to retire."

"What is this that you say?"

"I say, Sire, that my health is giving way under these struggles and this everlasting work, and that I shall never be able to stand the fatigue of the siege of La Rochelle. It would be better for you to employ M. de Condé or M. de Bassompierre, or some valiant soldier, and not myself, who am a Churchman. You will no doubt be happier at home and more powerful abroad."

"Cardinal, I understand," said the King; "all the persons mentioned in this letter shall be punished as they deserve, even the Queen."

"What say you, Sire? God forbid that the Queen should

suffer any annoyance on my behalf! She has always believed me to be her enemy, but your Majesty is aware how warmly I have ever taken her part. Ah! if she betrayed the honour of your Majesty, that would be another affair, and I should be the first to say 'No mercy.' Happily your Majesty has acquired proof that there is no cause for alarm."

"That is true, Cardinal; you are always right; but the Queen none the less deserves my wrath."

"It is you, Sire, who have incurred hers; your Majesty has treated her with a severity——"

"It is thus that I shall always treat my enemies and yours, no matter how high placed they may be."

"The Queen is my enemy, but not yours, Sire; on the contrary, she is a devoted wife; allow me to intercede for her."

"Then let her humble herself and come to me first."

"On the contrary, Sire, you should set the example; you committed the first wrong by suspecting the Queen."

"That I should make the first advances!" said the King; "never!"

"Sire, I implore you."

"Besides, what advances could I make?"

"You might do something that you know would please her."

"For instance?"

"Give a ball; you know how the Queen loves dancing; she would not be proof against such an attention."

"Cardinal, you know that I do not like mundane pleasures."

"The Queen will be all the more grateful; besides, it will be an opportunity for her to wear the handsome diamond aiguillettes which you gave her on her *fête* day, and which she has not yet worn."

"We will see about it, Cardinal," said the King, in his joy of finding the Queen guilty of a crime he cared little about, and innocent of a fault which he greatly dreaded. "You are too indulgent."

"Sire," said the Cardinal, "leave severity to your ministers. Indulgence is a royal virtue. Employ it, and you will find it to your advantage."

Upon this the Cardinal asked leave to retire, imploring the King to make it up with the Queen.

Anne of Austria, who, after the seizure of the letter, expected reproaches, was much astonished the next day to find the King making overtures. Her first movement was one of repulsion; her pride as a woman and her dignity as a Queen had been cruelly

offended. However, on the advice of her women, she affected to relent. The King seized this opportunity to say that he intended to give a *fête* in the near future.

This was so rare an event for poor Anne of Austria, that the announcement, as the Cardinal foresaw, dispelled the last vestige of resentment, if not from her heart, at least from her face. She asked what day the *fête* would take place, but the King replied that he must arrange this with the Cardinal.

On each of the following days the King asked the Cardinal. Ten days passed thus.

On the eighth day after the scene we have related the Cardinal received a letter with the London postmark, containing these lines :

> I have them, but I cannot leave London for want of money. Send me five hundred pistoles, and four or five days after receiving them I shall be in Paris.

The same day the King put the usual question to the Cardinal, who, counting on his fingers, said to himself, " She will be here in ten days ; allowing for contrary winds and accidents, in twelve days."

" Sire," said the Cardinal, " it is the twentieth of September ; the third of October will suit." Then the Cardinal added, " By the way, Sire, do not forget to ask the Queen to wear her diamond aiguillettes."

CHAPTER XVII

THE BONACIEUX HOUSEHOLD

THIS was the second time that the Cardinal had returned to the diamond aiguillettes. Louis XIII was struck by this insistence, and scented a mystery. More than once the King had felt humiliated, that the Cardinal, by means of his police, should know better than he did what was passing in his own household. He hoped, in a conversation with Anne of Austria, to clear up this matter. He therefore went to see the Queen, and began, as usual, to threaten those who surrounded her. Anne of Austria bowed her head, and let the storm pass without replying, hoping that it would pass over ; but this was not what Louis XIII desired. He wished for a discussion, from which some light would spring, convinced as he was that the Cardinal was preparing some terrible

surprise. He attained this object by his persistence in accusation.

"But!" cried Anne of Austria, wearied by these vague attacks, "you do not tell me, Sire, all that you have in your heart. What have I done? What crime have I committed? It is impossible that your Majesty should make all this noise over a letter to my brother."

The King, thus attacked in his turn, knew not what to answer; he thought the moment had come to make the request, which was to have been made only on the eve of the *fête*.

"Madame," he said, "there will soon be a ball at the Hôtel de Ville, and I intend, to do honour to our honest aldermen, that you should appear in State costume, and above all wearing the diamond aiguillettes I gave you for your *fête*. That is my answer."

The answer was a terrible one. Anne of Austria thought that the King knew everything, and that the Cardinal had got him to dissemble for the last week. She became exceedingly pale, and looking at his Majesty with terrified eyes, did not answer a word.

"You hear, madame?" said the King, who enjoyed this embarrassment without guessing the cause; "you hear?"

"Yes, Sire, I hear," stammered the Queen.

"You will appear at this ball?"

"Yes."

"With the aiguillettes?"

"Yes."

The pallor of the Queen increased if possible, and with that cold cruelty which was one of his characteristics, Louis gloated over it.

"Then it is agreed; that is all I had to say to you."

"But what day will the ball take place?"

Louis XIII instinctively felt that he should not reply to this question, which the Queen had put in a hardly audible voice.

"Very shortly, madame," he said. "I cannot recollect the exact date, but I will ask the Cardinal."

The Queen curtseyed, less from etiquette, than because her knees failed her.

The King departed, delighted.

"I am lost," murmured the Queen, "lost, for the Cardinal knows all!"

She knelt on a cushion and prayed, burying her head in her palpitating arms.

The position was indeed terrible. Buckingham had returned

to London. Madame de Chevreuse was at Tours. La Porte could not leave the Louvre ; she had not a soul in the world she could trust. Faced by impending ruin and abandoned by all, she burst into sobs.

" Can I be of no service to your Majesty ? " said suddenly a voice full of sweetness and pity.

The Queen turned quickly round, and perceived the pretty Madame Bonacieux, who had been engaged in arranging the dresses and linen in an adjoining room when the King entered. She had been unable to leave and had heard everything.

The Queen uttered a shriek thus taken by surprise, for she did not at once recognize the young woman.

" Oh ! fear nothing, madame," said Madame Bonacieux, clasping her hands, and herself weeping at the anguish of the Queen. " I am attached to your Majesty body and soul, and, lowly though my position be, I think I have found a way to get your Majesty out of this difficulty."

" You ! Oh, Heaven ! " exclaimed the Queen. " But look straight at me. I am betrayed on all sides. Can I trust in you ? "

" Oh, madame ! " cried the young woman, " I am ready to die for your Majesty."

This cry came from the depth of the heart, and there was no mistaking it.

" Yes," continued Madame Bonacieux, " there are traitors here. Those aiguillettes, for which the King asks, did you not give them to the Duke of Buckingham ? "

" Oh ! my God ! my God ! " cried the Queen, whose teeth chattered with fright.

" Well ! those aiguillettes," continued Madame Bonacieux, " you must get them back."

" No doubt I must," cried the Queen, " but how ? "

" You must send some one to the Duke."

" But who ? Who can I trust ? "

" Have confidence in me, madame, and I will find a messenger."

" But it will be necessary to write ! "

" Yes, that will be indispensable ; two lines in your Majesty's hand."

" But these two lines may mean my condemnation, exile, divorce ! "

" Yes, if they fall into evil hands ! but I guarantee that they shall reach their address."

"Oh! my God! must I then place my life and my honour in your hands?"

"Yes, madame, yes, and I shall safeguard them."

"But how?"

"My husband was set at liberty a few days ago. I have not yet had time to see him. He is a good, honest man, and will do as I wish; on an order from me he will start, and will deliver the letter without even knowing that it comes from your Majesty."

The Queen seized the two hands of the young woman, gazed at her as if she would read her heart, and seeing only sincerity in her eyes, embraced her tenderly.

"Do that," she cried, "and you will save my life and my honour."

"Give me then this letter, madame, for time presses."

The Queen ran to a little table, wrote two lines, sealed the letter with her private seal, and handed it to Madame Bonacieux.

"And now," said the Queen, "we are forgetting a very necessary thing, money."

Madame Bonacieux blushed.

"Yes, it is true, and I must acknowledge to your Majesty that my husband——"

"Your husband has none, you would say?"

"Oh, yes, he has; but he is very avaricious. However, your Majesty need not be uneasy; we will find means——"

"The fact is, I have none either," said the Queen; "but wait."

Anne of Austria ran to her jewel-case.

"Here," she said, "is a ring of great value. It comes from my brother, the King of Spain, and I can dispose of it. Turn it into money, and let your husband start."

"In an hour you shall be obeyed."

"You see the address," added the Queen, speaking so low that she could hardly be heard; "the Duke of Buckingham, London."

"The letter shall be handed to him."

"You have a big heart, my dear!" Anne of Austria exclaimed.

Madame Bonacieux kissed the Queen's hands, and hiding the letter in her bosom, disappeared with the lightness of a bird.

Ten minutes later she was home. As she had told the Queen, she had not seen her husband since he had been set at liberty; she was ignorant of his changed feelings toward the Cardinal—a change which had been strengthened by subsequent visits from the Comte de Rochefort, who had become the most intimate friend of Bonacieux, and who had no difficulty in persuading him that the abduction of his wife was due to political causes alone.

She found M. Bonacieux alone ; the poor man had had great trouble in setting the house in order. The servant had fled when her master was arrested.

The married pair, although they had not seen each other for a week, and though during that period serious events had happened, met with a certain preoccupation. Nevertheless, Bonacieux manifested real joy, and advanced with open arms toward his wife. Madame Bonacieux presented her forehead.

" Let us have a little talk," she said.

" What ? " said Bonacieux, astonished.

" Yes ; I have something of the greatest importance to tell you."

" And truly I also have some serious questions to ask you. Explain your abduction, I beg you."

" We sha'n't talk of that for the moment."

" And of what, then ? Of my captivity ? "

" I learned of it the same day ; but as you had been guilty of no crime I did not attach much importance to the matter."

" You speak at your ease, madame ! " replied Bonacieux, offended at the little interest manifested by his wife. " Do you know that I was plunged for a day and a night into a cell of the Bastille ? "

" A day and a night are soon passed. Say no more of your captivity. Let us come to what brings me here."

" What ! it is not then the desire to see your husband, from whom you have been separated for a week ? " asked the mercer, much hurt.

" It is that, first of all, and something else besides."

" Speak ! "

" A matter of the greatest importance, on which perhaps depends our future fortune."

" Our fortune has quite changed since I saw you, Madame Bonacieux, and I shall be astonished if within a few months many people do not envy us."

" Yes ; especially if you will follow my instructions."

" I ? "

" Yes, you. There is a good and sacred action to perform, sir, and a great deal of money to be made at the same time."

Madame Bonacieux knew that in speaking of money to her husband she touched him in his weak point. But even a mercer, when he has spoken for ten minutes with Cardinal Richelieu, is not the same man.

" A great deal of money to gain ? " said Bonacieux.

"Yes, a great deal."

"About how much?"

"A thousand pistoles, perhaps."

"What must be done?"

"You must start at once; I will give you a paper which you must deliver into the right hands."

"And where must I start for?"

"For London."

"I, for London! You are joking. I have nothing to do in London."

"But others require you to go there."

"Who are these others? I warn you that I shall do nothing more with my eyes shut, and that I must know not only to what I expose myself but also for whom."

"An illustrious person sends you; an illustrious person awaits you. The recompense will exceed your desires. This is all I can promise."

"Intrigues again! always intrigues! Thanks, I distrust them, since the Cardinal has enlightened me."

"The Cardinal!" exclaimed Madame Bonacieux; "you have seen the Cardinal?"

"He sent for me," replied the mercer proudly.

"And you answered his invitation?—imprudent man that you are!"

"I must say that I had no choice, for I went between two guards. I should have been delighted to have dispensed with this visit."

"He ill-treated you, then? Did he threaten you?"

"He gave me his hand and called me his friend; his friend—do you hear, madame? I am the friend of the great Cardinal!"

"You serve the Cardinal?"

"Yes, madame; and as his servant I will not permit you to indulge in plots against the security of the State, and to serve the intrigues of a woman who is not French, and who is Spanish at heart."

Madame Bonacieux, who had counted upon her husband, and who had answered for him to the Queen, trembled at the danger into which she had almost fallen. However, knowing the weakness and the cupidity of her husband, she did not despair of gaining her end.

"Ah, you are a Cardinalist, sir!" she cried; "you serve the party which ill-treats your wife and insults the Queen?"

"Private interests are nothing compared with general interests.

I am for those who serve the State," said Bonacieux pompously.

This was a phrase he had learned from the Comte de Rochefort.

" And do you know what the State is of which you speak ? Be satisfied with being a plain *bourgeois*, and join the side which offers you the greatest advantages."

" Eh, eh ! " said Bonacieux, tapping a well-filled sack, which gave out a silvery sound. " What do you say of that, Madame Preacher ? "

" Where does that money come from ? "

" Can't you guess ? "

" From the Cardinal ? "

" From him and from my friend the Comte de Rochefort."

" The Comte de Rochefort ! why, it was he who carried me off ! "

" That is possible, madame."

" And you receive money from that man ? "

" Did you not tell me that this abduction was political ? "

" Yes, but its object was to make me betray my august mistress, and to tear from me, by torture, confessions capable of compromising her honour, and perhaps her life."

" Madame, your august mistress is a perfidious Spaniard, and what the Cardinal does is well done."

" Sir, I knew you to be cowardly, avaricious, and idiotic, but I was not aware that you were infamous ! "

" Madame," said Bonacieux, who had never seen his wife in a rage, and who recoiled before the conjugal wrath, " madame, what is that you say ? "

" That you are a wretch ! " continued Madame Bonacieux, who saw that she was regaining some influence over her husband. " Ah ! you dabble in politics, you ! and the politics of the Cardinal ! Ah ! you sell yourself for money, body and soul to the demon."

" No ; to the Cardinal."

" It is the same thing. Who says ' Richelieu ' says ' Satan.' "

" Silence, madame, silence ! you might be overheard."

" You are right. I should be ashamed of your cowardice."

" But, come, what do you wish me to do ? "

" I have told you ; you will start at once, sir, and accomplish your mission faithfully. On this condition I will pardon you ; and what is more," she held out her hand to him, " I will restore you my friendship."

Bonacieux was a poltroon and a miser ; but he loved his wife ; he was softened. A man of fifty cannot long retain rancour against a woman of twenty-three. Madame Bonacieux saw that he hesitated.

" Come, have you made up your mind ? " she said.

" But, my dear, reflect a little on what you ask ; London is far from Paris, and perhaps the mission is not without danger."

" What matter, if you avoid it ! "

" Look here ! Madame Bonacieux ; decidedly I refuse. Intrigues frighten me. I have seen the Bastille. No, decidedly I will not go. Why don't you go yourself ? In truth, I believe that I have been deceived in you, and that you are a man ! "

" And you, you are a woman—a wretched, stupid dolt of a woman ! Ah, you are afraid ! Well, if you do not start at once I will have you arrested by order of the Queen, and I will have you put in that Bastille, of which you are so frightened ! "

Bonacieux began to reflect deeply. He weighed in his mind the anger of the Cardinal against that of the Queen ; the Cardinal's anger seemed much the more to be feared.

" Have me arrested by order of the Queen," he said, " and I will appeal to his Eminence."

Madame Bonacieux saw that she had gone too far and was greatly alarmed. She contemplated for an instant with terror this stupid face which showed the invincible resolution of fools who are frightened.

" Well, so be it," she said. " Perhaps you are right ; a man knows more about politics than a woman, especially you, M. Bonacieux, who have spoken with the Cardinal ; and yet it is very hard that my husband, a man on whose affection I thought I could reckon, should treat me so unkindly, and not satisfy my whim."

" But your whims may lead one too far," cried Bonacieux triumphantly ; " and I distrust them."

" I will give it up, then," said the young woman ; " let us say no more about it."

" If at least you told me what I should have to do in London," said Bonacieux, who remembered rather late that Rochefort had recommended him to try and learn the secrets of his wife.

" It would be useless to tell you," said the young woman distrustfully. " It was merely to effect a purchase over which there was a large sum to be made."

The more the young woman defended herself, the more sure was Bonacieux that the secret was important ; he resolved, therefore,

to go at once to Rochefort to inform him that the Queen was seeking a messenger, to send him to London.

"Pardon, if I leave you, my dear Madame Bonacieux," said he; "but not knowing that you were coming I had made an appointment with a friend. I will return in an instant; and, as it is late, I will escort you to the Louvre."

"Thank you, sir; you are not brave enough to be of any use to me, and I can return to the Louvre alone."

"As you like, Madame Bonacieux. Shall I see you again soon?"

"Next week, no doubt."

"I will expect you. You are not angry?"

"I! not the least in the world."

Bonacieux kissed the hand of his wife, and walked rapidly away.

"It only wanted that," said Madame Bonacieux, as her husband shut the door, "that that dolt should be a Cardinalist. And I, who answered for him to the Queen; I, who promised my poor mistress. . . . My God! she will take me for one of those wretches who swarm in the palace and whose mission is to spy on her! Ah, Monsieur Bonacieux, I never loved you much; now it is much worse! I hate you! And, on my word, you shall pay for this!"

At the moment she uttered these words a knock on the ceiling made her look up, and a voice, which came through the planking, cried:

"Dear Madame Bonacieux, open the little door in the alley, and I will come down to see you."

CHAPTER XVIII

LOVER AND HUSBAND

AH, madame!" said D'Artagnan, entering by the door, "allow me to say that you have a sorry husband."

"Then you heard our conversation?" asked Madame Bonacieux quickly, and looking anxiously at D'Artagnan.

"Every word."

"But how, my God?"

"By a method known to myself; and by which I heard your animated conversation with the agents of the Cardinal."

"And what do you understand from what we were saying?"

"A thousand things. First of all, that your husband is a simpleton, fortunately; then, that you are much embarrassed —of which I am very glad, as it will allow me to offer my services, and God knows that I am ready to throw myself into the fire for you; lastly, that the Queen stands in need of a brave, intelligent, and devoted man to go to London for her. I have at least two out of the three qualities necessary, and here I am!"

Madame Bonacieux did not answer; but her heart beat with joy, and a secret hope glistened in her eyes.

"And what guarantee will you give me," she asked, "if I consent to confide this mission to you?"

"My love for you. Come, give me your orders: what must I do?"

"My God!" exclaimed the young woman, "ought I to confide such a secret to you? You are almost a child!"

"I am an honourable man!"

"I believe it."

"I am brave."

"Of that I am quite sure."

"Then put me to the test."

Madame Bonacieux looked at the young man, still hesitating. But there was so much ardour in his eyes, so much persuasion in his voice, that she felt impelled to trust him. Besides, she was placed in one of those circumstances when one must risk everything. The involuntary feeling excited by her young protector decided her to speak.

"Listen," she said; "I yield to your assurances. But I swear before God that if you betray me, I will kill myself, and my death will be at your door."

"And *I* swear before God that if I am caught I shall die sooner than speak a word that would compromise anyone."

Then the young woman confided to D'Artagnan the terrible secret, of which chance had already revealed a portion to him opposite the Samaritaine. This was their mutual declaration of love. D'Artagnan's face sparkled with joy and pride. This secret which he possessed, this woman whom he loved, made him a giant.

"I start," he said; "I will start at once."

"What, you are starting?" cried Madame Bonacieux; "and your regiment, and your captain?"

"On my soul, you made me forget all that, dear Constance! You are right; I must obtain a furlough."

"Again an obstacle," murmured Madame Bonacieux.

" Oh, that one can be surmounted ; never fear ! " cried D'Artagnan.

" How ? "

" I will call on M. de Tréville this very evening, and will beg of him to ask this favour from M. des Essarts."

" Now, something else."

" What ? " asked D'Artagnan, seeing Madame Bonacieux hesitate.

" Perhaps you have got no money ? "

" There is no ' perhaps ' about it," said D'Artagnan, smiling.

" Then," said Madame Bonacieux, opening a cupboard, and taking from it the sack which half an hour before had been so tenderly caressed by her husband, " take this sack."

" The Cardinal's gold ! " cried D'Artagnan, with a burst of laughter. " It will be very diverting to save the Queen with the Cardinal's money."

" You are an amiable and charming young man," said Madame Bonacieux. " Believe me, her Majesty will not be ungrateful."

" Oh, I am already sufficiently recompensed. I love you, and you permit me to tell you so. This is more than I dared to hope."

" Silence ! " said Madame Bonacieux, trembling.

" What is it ? "

" Some one is speaking in the street."

" It is the voice——"

" Of my husband ! Yes, I recognize it."

D'Artagnan ran to the door and pushed the bolt.

" When I am gone you can open the door," he said.

" But I ought to have left also. And the disappearance of this money—how shall I account for it if I am here ? "

" You are right ; we must leave."

" How ? He will see us go out."

" Then, you must come up to my apartment."

" Ah, you said that in a tone which frightens me."

Madame Bonacieux pronounced these words with a tear in her eye. D'Artagnan saw this tear, and, touched, he fell at her knees.

" You will be as secure as in a temple," he said. " I pledge my word of honour."

" Let us go," she said ; " I put faith in you, my friend."

D'Artagnan withdrew the bolt cautiously, and both, light as shadows, slipped through the inner door into the alley, and ascended the stairs without noise. Once in his apartment, the

young man, for greater security, barricaded the door. They both approached the window, and saw through a slit in the shutter M. Bonacieux talking with a man in a cloak. At the sight of that man D'Artagnan bounded, and half drawing his sword, sprang to the door. It was the man of Meung.

"What would you do?" cried Madame Bonacieux. "You will ruin us."

"But I have sworn to kill that man," cried D'Artagnan.

"For the moment your life does not belong to you. In the name of the Queen I forbid you to incur any danger not necessitated by this journey."

"And in your name, have you no orders?"

"In my own name," said Madame Bonacieux with emotion, "in my own name, I implore you. But let us listen. I think they are talking of me?" D'Artagnan went back to the window.

M. Bonacieux had reopened his door, and on seeing that the apartment was empty, had returned to the man in the cloak.

"She has gone," said he; "and must have returned to the Louvre."

"Are you sure," replied the stranger, "that she did not suspect your intentions when you came out?"

"No," said Bonacieux, with a self-sufficient air, "she is too superficial."

"Is the cadet of the Guards at home?"

"I don't think so; as you perceive, his shutter is closed, and there is no light shining through."

"All the same we must make sure."

"How?"

"By knocking at his door."

"I will ask his domestic."

Bonacieux entered the house, ascended the stairs, and knocked at D'Artagnan's door.

No one answered. Porthos, to cut a greater figure, had borrowed Planchet for the evening. When Bonacieux knocked, the fugitives felt their hearts bound.

"There is no one there," said Bonacieux.

"No matter, let us go in; we shall be more secure than at the door."

"Ah!" said Madame Bonacieux, "we shall hear nothing more."

"On the contrary, we shall hear better."

D'Artagnan lifted up three or four boards which formed an

ear of Dionysius in his room, and made a sign to Madame Bonacieux to stoop down.

"You are sure that there is no one there?" said the stranger.

"I will answer for that."

"And you think that your wife——"

"Has returned to the Louvre."

"Without speaking to anyone but you?"

"I am certain of that."

"That is an important point, you understand?"

"So then the news I brought you has some value——?"

"Very great value. I do not conceal that, my dear Bonacieux."

"Then the Cardinal will be satisfied with me?"

"I do not doubt it."

"The great Cardinal!"

"Are you sure that in her conversation with you, your wife pronounced no names?"

"I do not think so."

"Neither Madame de Chevreuse, the Duke of Buckingham, nor Madame de Vernet?"

"No; she merely said that she wished to send me to London to serve the interests of an illustrious person."

"The traitor!" murmured Madame Bonacieux.

"Silence!" said D'Artagnan, taking a hand which she abandoned to him without thinking.

"No matter," continued the man in the cloak; "you are a simpleton for not having feigned to accept the mission; you would have the letter now; the State, which is threatened, would be saved, and you——"

"And I——?"

"Well, you! the Cardinal would have given you letters of nobility."

"He told you so?"

"Yes; I know that he wished to give you this surprise."

"My wife adores me, and there is still time," said Bonacieux.

"The fool!" murmured Madame Bonacieux.

"Silence!" said D'Artagnan, pressing her hand.

"How can there still be time?" resumed the man in the cloak.

"I can return to the Louvre, ask for Madame Bonacieux, say that I have reflected, obtain the letter, and rush off to the Cardinal."

"Well, go quickly, and I will return shortly to know the result."

The stranger took his departure.

" The scoundrel ! " said Madame Bonacieux.

" Silence ! " repeated D'Artagnan, pressing her hand still more tightly.

At this moment a terrible howl interrupted the reflections of D'Artagnan and Madame Bonacieux. It was her husband, who had perceived the disappearance of his sack, and who was shouting, " Robbers ! robbers ! "

" Oh, my God ! " cried Madame Bonacieux ; " he will arouse the whole quarter."

Bonacieux shouted long ; but as similar cries were frequently heard, they attracted little attention. The mercer, finding that no one came, left the house, still shouting.

" And now that he is gone," said Madame Bonacieux, " it is our turn to escape ; courage, and above all, prudence, and remember that you belong to the Queen."

" To her and to you," cried D'Artagnan. " Be assured, lovely Constance, that I shall prove worthy of her gratitude ; but shall I return also worthy of your love ? "

The young woman replied only by a deep blush which coloured her cheeks. Some moments later, wrapped in his cloak, D'Artagnan also left the house.

Madame Bonacieux followed him with her eyes, with that fond look with which a woman accompanies the man she loves ; but when he had disappeared round the corner, she fell on her knees, and clasping her hands, cried :

" Oh, God, protect the Queen ; protect me ! "

CHAPTER XIX

A JOURNEY

D'ARTAGNAN went straight to M. de Tréville. He knew that in a few minutes the Cardinal would be warned of what had happened by that infernal stranger, and he rightly judged that there was not a moment to lose.

The heart of the young man was overflowing with joy. An opportunity for gaining both glory and money presented itself, and brought him into close communion with the woman he adored.

M. de Tréville was in his *salon* with his friends. D'Artagnan, who was known as an intimate of the house, went straight to his

cabinet, and sent word that he had something important to communicate. He had been there hardly five minutes when M. de Tréville entered. A glance at D'Artagnan's face told the worthy captain that there was something new. M. de Tréville had always been so kind to him ; he was so devoted to the King and to the Queen, and so cordially hated the Cardinal, that the young man had made up his mind to tell him everything.

" You have asked to see me, my young friend ? " said M. de Tréville.

" Yes, sir ; and I hope you will excuse me when you learn what brings me here."

" Speak ; I am listening."

" It concerns nothing less than the honour and perhaps the life of the Queen," said D'Artagnan, lowering his voice.

" What say you ? " said M. de Tréville, looking round to see if they were alone.

" I say, sir, that chance has made me master of a secret——"

" Which you will keep, I hope, young man, on your life."

" But which I must confide to you, sir, for you alone can aid me in the mission I have received from her Majesty."

" Is this secret yours ? "

" No, sir ; it belongs to the Queen."

" Are you authorized by her Majesty to confide it to me ? "

" No, sir ; on the contrary, the most profound secrecy was enjoined upon me."

" And why are you going to betray it to me ? "

" Because without you I can do nothing, and because I fear that you will not grant a request I have to make without knowing why it is made."

" Keep your secret, young man, and tell me what you wish."

" I wish you to obtain for me, from M. des Essarts, a fortnight's leave of absence."

" When ? "

" This very night."

" Are you leaving Paris ? "

" I am going on a mission."

" Can you tell me where ? "

" To London."

" Has anyone an interest in your not reaching your destination ? "

" The Cardinal, I believe, would give anything in the world to prevent me from succeeding."

" And you go alone ? "

"I go alone."

"In that case, I tell you, on the faith of Tréville, you will not get past Bondy."

"Why so?"

"You will be assassinated."

"I shall die doing my duty."

"But your mission will not be fulfilled."

"That is true," said D'Artagnan.

"Believe me," went on Tréville, "in enterprises of this nature four must start if one is to arrive."

"Ah! you are right, sir; but you know Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, and that I can dispose of them."

"Without confiding to them the secret which I declined to know?"

"We have sworn unlimited confidence in each other, and devotion; besides, you can tell them that you have full confidence in me, and they will not be more incredulous than you."

"I can only send them each on furlough for a fortnight. The fact of granting the furlough will prove that I authorize their journey."

"Thank you, sir; you are extremely kind."

"Go and find them, and let everything be done to-night. But first of all write out your request to M. des Essarts. Perhaps you have a spy at your heels, and your visit, which in that case is already known to the Cardinal, will thus have a legitimate motive."

D'Artagnan wrote his request, and M. de Tréville promised that before 2 A.M. the four furloughs would be delivered.

"Have the goodness to send mine to the house of Athos," said D'Artagnan. "I fear that if I were to return home something unpleasant might befall me."

"Certainly. Adieu, and a good voyage! *A propos*," said M. de Tréville, calling him back, "have you any money?"

D'Artagnan jingled the sack which he had in his pocket.

"Enough?" asked M. de Tréville.

"Three hundred pistoles."

"Good; you could go to the end of the world with that."

D'Artagnan saluted M. de Tréville, who held out his hand to him.

. . . . .

At two in the morning our four adventurers left Paris by the gate of Saint-Denis. As long as it was dark they remained

silent, but at break of day their tongues were loosened, gaiety returned with the sun: it was like the eve of a combat, when the heart beats, the eyes laugh, and when one feels that life, which one is perhaps about to lose, is an excellent thing.

The appearance of this caravan was most formidable; the black horses of the musketeers, their martial air—that squadron habit which made the noble companions of the soldier keep their line, would have betrayed the most strict incognito. The lackeys followed, armed to the teeth.

All went well as far as Chantilly, which was reached at about eight in the morning. It was breakfast-time. They alighted at an inn, which had for sign St Martin giving half of his cloak to a beggar. They entered the common room and sat down to table.

A gentleman who had just arrived by the Dammartin road was seated at the same table eating his breakfast. He entered into conversation about the weather. The travellers replied: he drank to their health; the travellers responded.

But just as Mousqueton came to announce that the horses were ready, and they were leaving the table, the stranger proposed to Porthos the health of the Cardinal. Porthos replied that he would drink it willingly if the stranger would drink to the King. The stranger replied that he knew no other King than his Eminence. Porthos called him a drunkard; the stranger drew his sword.

"You have committed an imprudence," said Athos. "However, there is no help for it now; kill this man and rejoin us as soon as possible."

And the three got on their horses and galloped away, while Porthos promised to run his adversary through.

"That's one of us gone!" said Athos after five minutes.

"But why did this man attack Porthos rather than another?" asked Aramis.

"Because Porthos, speaking louder than the rest, was taken for the chief," said D'Artagnan.

"I always said that this cadet of Gascony was full of wisdom," said Athos.

And the travellers continued their journey.

At Beauvais they stopped for two hours, both to breathe their horses and to wait for Porthos. At the end of two hours, as Porthos did not arrive, they took the road again.

Within a league from Beauvais they came across eight or ten men, who, taking advantage of the fact that the road was not

paved at this place, appeared to be engaged in digging holes, and making ruts.

Aramis, fearing to dirty his boots, apostrophized them sharply. Athos tried to restrain him, but it was too late. The workmen began to jeer at the travellers, and by their insolence made even Athos lose his head, and ride at them.

Then each man fell back to the ditch, and taking up a hidden musket, fired on the travellers. A bullet passed through the shoulder of Aramis, and Mousqueton received another in the fleshy portion of the body below the loins. Mousqueton alone fell, not that he was seriously wounded, but as he could not see his wound, he thought it more dangerous than it was.

"This is an ambush," said D'Artagnan; "don't return a shot, but let us make off!"

Aramis, wounded though he was, seized the mane of his horse, who carried him along with the others. That of Mousqueton had rejoined them, and galloped alone in the ranks.

"That will be a spare horse for us," said Athos.

"I should prefer a hat," said D'Artagnan, "for mine has been carried away by a bullet. It is fortunate that the letter was not in it."

"Oh! but they will kill poor Porthos when he passes," said Aramis.

"If Porthos were on his legs, he would have joined us ere now," said Athos. "I expect the drunkard turned out to be sober when it came to fighting."

And they galloped on for two hours, although their horses were so tired that they ran the risk of knocking them up altogether.

The travellers had gone across country, hoping thus to avoid any further difficulties, but at Crèvecœur Aramis declared that he could go no further; indeed, it had required all the courage concealed under his elegant appearance and polished manner to have gone so far. They took him off his horse at the door of an inn, left Bazin with him, and rode on in the hope of spending the night at Amiens.

"*Morbleu!*" said Athos, "I shall not be their dupe again, and I will neither open my mouth nor draw my sword before reaching Calais. I swear it."

"Do not swear," said D'Artagnan; "let us gallop, if our horses are able."

And the travellers struck their spurs into their steeds, who, thus stimulated, recovered some strength. They reached Amiens at midnight, and alighted at the Lis d'Or.

The landlord had the appearance of the most honest man in the world. He received the travellers with a candle in one hand and his night-cap in the other. He wished to lodge them each in a charming chamber, but, unfortunately, these chambers were at opposite extremities of the inn. D'Artagnan and Athos refused them: the host replied that he had no others worthy of their excellencies; but the travellers declared that they could sleep in the common room, each on a mattress laid on the floor. The host remonstrated, but the travellers remained firm.

They had just arranged their bed and barricaded the door, when some one knocked at the shutter. They asked who was there, recognized the voices of their lackeys, and opened.

It was Grimaud and Planchet.

"Grimaud alone can look after the horses," said Planchet; "and if you like, gentlemen, I will sleep across your door to make sure of no one getting at you."

"What will you sleep upon?" said D'Artagnan.

"Here is my bed," said Planchet, showing a truss of straw.

"Come along, then," said D'Artagnan; "I don't like that landlord's face, it is too civil."

Planchet got in by the window and took up his quarters across the door, while Grimaud shut himself up in the stable, undertaking that the horses would be ready at five in the morning.

The night passed off quietly; toward two in the morning, indeed, some one tried to open the door, but as Planchet jumped up and shouted, "Who goes there?" the person said it was a mistake and went away.

At four o'clock a great noise was heard in the stables. Grimaud had insisted on rousing the ostlers, and they were beating him. When our travellers opened the window, they saw the poor fellow lying senseless, his head cut open with the handle of a pitchfork.

Planchet went into the yard to saddle the horses, but the horses had gone lame. That of Mousqueton alone, which had been travelling without a rider, might have continued the journey, but unfortunately the veterinary surgeon, who had been sent for, it would appear, to bleed the landlord's horse, had bled that of Mousqueton.

Matters began to look serious; this series of accidents might be the result of chance, but they might also be the result of a plot. Athos and D'Artagnan went out, while Planchet endeavoured to learn if there were three horses to be sold in the neighbourhood. At the door were two powerful and

well-equipped steeds. This was just what they wanted. They asked where their masters were, and were informed that the two gentlemen had passed the night at the inn, and were settling their account.

Athos went to pay the bill, while D'Artagnan and Planchet stood at the street door. The host was in a lower room at some distance, where Athos was asked to go. He entered without distrust, and drew out two pistols; the host was alone, seated before his desk. He took the money in his hand, and turned it over three or four times. Then suddenly he exclaimed that the coins were counterfeit, and that he would have him and his companion arrested.

"Scoundrel," said Athos, walking toward him; "I'll split your ears."

At the same moment, four men, armed to the teeth, entered by the side doors, and flung themselves upon Athos.

"I am caught!" shouted Athos at the top of his voice; "escape, D'Artagnan; spur, spur!" and he fired two pistol-shots.

D'Artagnan and Planchet did not require to be told twice; they untied the horses which were waiting at the door, jumped on them, and spurred away at full gallop.

"Do you know what has become of Athos?" asked D'Artagnan as they galloped along.

"Ah, sir, I saw two men fall to his pistol-shots, and it seemed to me that he was using his sword against the others."

"Gallant Athos!" murmured D'Artagnan. "To think that he must be abandoned! But perhaps the same fate awaits us. Forward, Planchet, forward; you are a brave fellow."

"I told you, sir, that use brought out the qualities of the Picards; besides, I am in my own country here, and that excites me."

They both spurred on and arrived at Saint-Omer without drawing bridle. At Saint-Omer they allowed their horses to breathe, holding their bridles for fear of accident, and eating a bit themselves, without sitting down. They then resumed their journey.

A hundred yards from the gates of Calais, D'Artagnan's horse fell, and could not be got up again; the blood was streaming from its nostrils and eyes. The horse of Planchet had also stopped, and now refused to move. Fortunately, as has been said, they were close to the town; they left the animals on the high road, and ran to the harbour Planchet pointed out to his master

a gentleman with his servant who preceded them by fifty paces. They rapidly approached this gentleman, who appeared to be in a great hurry. His boots were covered with dust, and he was asking if he could not cross over to England at once.

"Nothing would be more easy," said the captain of a vessel which was about to sail, "but an order arrived this morning not to let anyone leave without the express permission of the Cardinal."

"I have this permission," said the gentleman, taking a paper out of his pocket; "here it is."

"Have it endorsed by the Governor of the port," said the captain, "and give me the preference."

"Where shall I find the Governor?"

"At his country house."

"And his country house is situated?"

"At a quarter of a league from the town; you can see it from here."

"Very good," said the gentleman.

And, followed by his lackey, he took the road to the Governor's house. D'Artagnan and Planchet followed the gentleman at five hundred paces; and once out of the town, D'Artagnan quickened his step and overtook him as he was entering a little wood.

"You appear to be in a great hurry, sir?" said D'Artagnan.

"Impossible to be in a greater hurry, sir."

"I am sorry for it," said D'Artagnan, "for being in a great hurry also, I was going to ask you to do me a service."

"Which?"

"To allow me to pass first."

"Impossible," said the gentleman; "I have ridden sixty leagues in forty-four hours, and I must be in London to-morrow at noon."

"I have ridden the same distance in forty hours, and I must be in London to-morrow morning at ten."

"I am sorry, sir, but I arrived first, and will not take a second place."

"I much regret, but I arrived second and shall go first."

"The King's service," said the gentleman.

"My own service," said D'Artagnan.

"But it seems to me that you are trying to pick a quarrel."

"*Parbleu!* What else?"

"What do you want?"

"You wish to know?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I want the order of which you are bearer, as I have not got one, and as I must have one."

"You are joking, I presume."

"I never joke."

"Allow me to pass!"

"You shall not pass."

"My young sir, I shall break your head. Lubin, my pistols."

"Planchet, tackle the lackey; I will take charge of the master."

Planchet, emboldened by his first exploit, sprang upon Lubin, and as he was strong and active, he threw him to the ground, and placed a knee on his chest.

"Do your business, sir," cried Planchet; "I have done mine."

Seeing this, the gentleman drew his sword and rushed upon D'Artagnan, but he had met his match.

In three seconds D'Artagnan wounded him three times, saying at each thrust: "One for Athos, one for Porthos, one for Aramis." At the third the gentleman fell in a heap.

D'Artagnan thought he was dead, or at least in a faint, and drew near to take the order; but as he was stretching out his arm, the wounded man, who had not relinquished his sword, gave him a thrust in the chest, saying:

"One for you."

"And one for me—let the last be the best!" cried D'Artagnan, furious, running him through the body.

This time the gentleman shut his eyes and fainted.

D'Artagnan felt in his pockets and took his order. It was made out in the name of the Comte de Wardes.

Then, throwing a last look on the young man, who might be twenty-five years old, and whom he left there senseless, and perhaps dead, he sighed over the strange destiny which leads men to destroy each other for the interests of people who are quite strangers to them.

But he was soon aroused from these reflections by Lubin, who was howling and shouting for help at the top of his voice.

Planchet gripped his throat and squeezed it as tight as he could.

"Sir," said he, "as long as I hold him thus he will not shout, but once I let him go he will start again. I am sure he is a Norman, and the Normans are obstinate."

"Wait!" said D'Artagnan, and taking his handkerchief, he gagged him.

"Now," said Planchet, "let us tie him to a tree."

This was done very thoroughly, and they then drew the Comte de Wardes close to his lackey. As night was falling, it was evident that they would remain there until the next day.

"And now," said D'Artagnan, "to the Governor's house!"

"But surely you are wounded?" said Planchet.

"It is nothing. We will look to the wound afterward. It is not dangerous."

And they both hurried on to the worthy official's country seat.

The Comte de Wardes was announced, and D'Artagnan was introduced.

"You have an order signed by the Cardinal?" said the Governor.

"Yes, sir; here is it."

"Ah! ah! it is in due form, and well recommended."

"That is natural," said D'Artagnan; "I am one of his most faithful adherents."

"It appears that his Eminence wishes to hinder some one from going to England."

"Yes, a certain D'Artagnan, of Béarn, who left Paris with three of his friends, with the intention of going to London."

"Do you know him personally?" asked the Governor.

"Whom?"

"This D'Artagnan."

"Yes, quite well."

"Then give me a description of him."

"Nothing easier."

And D'Artagnan traced, feature for feature, the Comte de Wardes.

"Is he accompanied?"

"Yes, by a valet called Lubin."

"We shall keep a look-out for them, and should we lay hands on them, his Eminence may be sure that they shall be taken back to Paris under good escort."

"In so doing," said D'Artagnan, "you will deserve well of the Cardinal."

"You will see him on your return, Count?"

"Without any doubt."

"Tell him, I beg you, that I am his most devoted servant."

"I shall not fail."

Delighted at this assurance, the Governor endorsed the order, and handed it to D'Artagnan.

The latter lost no time in useless compliments; he bowed to the Governor, thanked him, and left.

Once outside the house, he and Planchet set out, and taking a long round, avoided the wood, and entered Calais by another gate.

The ship was still there ready to sail; the captain was waiting on the wharf.

"Well?" he said, on seeing D'Artagnan.

"Here is the pass endorsed."

"And the other gentleman?"

"He will not sail to-day; but make your mind easy, I will pay for us two."

"In that case let us start," said the captain.

D'Artagnan and Planchet jumped into a boat, and five minutes later they were on board. They were just in time, for when half a league out they saw a flash and heard a gun which announced the closing of the port.

D'Artagnan then attended to his wound, and found, as he had thought, that it was not serious: the point of the sword had encountered a rib, and had slipped along the bone; the shirt, too, had adhered to the wound, which had bled but a few drops.

D'Artagnan was overcome by fatigue; he stretched himself on a mattress on deck, and fell sound asleep.

The next morning he was three or four leagues from the English coast; the wind had been light during the night. At ten o'clock the ship cast anchor in the port of Dover, and at half-past ten D'Artagnan set foot on English soil, crying: "Here I am at last!"

But this was not all; he had to get to London.

D'Artagnan and Planchet took each a nag, a postilion rode before them, and four hours later they had reached the capital.

D'Artagnan did not know London, nor could he speak a word of English; but he wrote the name of the Duke of Buckingham, whose house was pointed out to him.

The Duke was hunting at Windsor with the King.

D'Artagnan asked for the confidential valet of the Duke, who accompanied him on all his voyages, and who spoke French perfectly. He told him that he had arrived from Paris on an affair of life and death, and that he must see his master without delay.

The confidence with which D'Artagnan spoke convinced

Patrick, for this was the name of this servant of the Minister. He had two horses saddled, and undertook to escort the young cadet. As for Planchet, he had been taken off his horse as stiff as a post, and at the end of his tether.

On reaching the castle, they learned that the King and the Duke were hawking in some marshes three miles from there. In twenty minutes they were at the spot indicated. Soon Patrick heard his master calling his falcon.

"Whom shall I announce to my lord Duke?" asked Patrick.

"The young man who one night picked a quarrel with him on the Pont Neuf."

"That is a strange recommendation."

"You will see that it is well worth another."

Patrick put his horse to a gallop, and reaching the Duke, announced the messenger in the above terms.

Buckingham at once recognized D'Artagnan, and not doubting that he was the bearer of urgent news from France, he galloped off to meet him.

"No misfortune has befallen the Queen?" cried Buckingham, throwing all his soul and all his love into the question.

"I do not think so, but I believe she is in great danger, from which your Grace alone can deliver her."

"I!" exclaimed Buckingham, "what! can I be so fortunate as to be of service to her? Speak! speak!"

"Take this letter," said D'Artagnan.

"This letter! from whom does it come?"

"From her Majesty, I believe."

"From her Majesty?" said Buckingham, growing so pale that D'Artagnan thought that he was going to faint.

And he broke the seal.

"How comes it to be torn?" he asked, showing D'Artagnan a hole.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan, "I had not noticed that. The Comte de Wardes must have done it when holing in my chest."

"You are wounded?" asked Buckingham.

"Oh! nothing!" said D'Artagnan; "a mere scratch."

"Good Heaven! what have I read?" exclaimed the Duke. "Patrick, remain here, or rather find the King, and implore him to excuse me, as a matter of the greatest importance calls me to London. Come, sir, come!"

And both galloped off in the direction of the capital.

CHAPTER XX

THE COUNTESS DE WINTER

ON the road the Duke made D'Artagnan tell him all that he knew, and putting this together with his own recollections, he was able to form a tolerable idea of a position, the gravity of which the Queen's letter, short and little explicit like it was, allowed him to realize. But what astonished him above all was that the Cardinal, interested as he was not to permit this young man to land in England, had not had him arrested on the way. It was then that D'Artagnan explained the precautions which had been taken, and how, thanks to the devotion of his three friends, scattered bleeding on the road, he had managed, at the expense of a sword-thrust, to accomplish his mission.

While listening to this story, told with the greatest simplicity, the Duke eyed the young man from time to time with an air of astonishment, as if unable to understand how so much prudence, valour, and devotion could go with a face which did not indicate as yet twenty years.

The horses went like the wind, and soon they reached the gates of London. D'Artagnan thought that on arriving in the city the Duke would draw rein, but he rode at full speed, careless of whom he knocked down. Two or three such accidents happened, but Buckingham did not even turn his head to see what had become of those he had ridden down. D'Artagnan followed him in the midst of cries which sounded very much like curses.

On entering the courtyard of his mansion, Buckingham leapt from his horse, threw the bridle on his neck, and hurried toward the steps. He walked so rapidly that D'Artagnan had some difficulty in keeping up with him. He passed through several rooms, of whose elegance the greatest lords in France could form no idea, and came at last to a bedroom which was a miracle of good taste and richness. In the alcove of this chamber was a door hidden by the tapestry, which the Duke opened with a gold key hanging from his neck by a gold chain. D'Artagnan had discreetly remained behind; but as Buckingham crossed the threshold he turned round, and seeing the hesitation of the young man, said:

"Come, and if you have the happiness to be admitted into the presence of her Majesty, tell her what you have seen."

Encouraged by this invitation, D'Artagnan followed the Duke, who closed the door behind him.

They found themselves in a little chapel hung with Persian silk and gold brocade, and brilliantly lighted by a large number of tapers. Over a kind of altar, and beneath a canopy of blue velvet, surmounted by red and white feathers, was a portrait of Anne of Austria, so perfect in its resemblance that D'Artagnan uttered a cry of surprise.

On the altar and under the portrait was the casket which contained the diamond aiguillettes.

The Duke approached the altar, knelt down as a priest would do before the image of Christ, and then opened the casket.

"Here," he said, taking from the casket a large knot of blue ribbon sparkling with diamonds, "here are the precious aiguillettes with which I had taken an oath to be buried. The Queen gave them to me; the Queen taketh away: her will, like God's, be done in all things."

Then he began to kiss the diamonds one after another. Suddenly he uttered a terrible cry.

"What is the matter?" asked D'Artagnan with anxiety.

"All is lost!" exclaimed Buckingham, becoming pale as death; "there are two aiguillettes missing—only ten remain."

"Has your lordship lost them, or have they been stolen?"

"They have been stolen," replied the Duke, "and it is the Cardinal who has done this. You see the ribbons which attached them have been cut with scissors."

"If your lordship knew who committed the theft—— Perhaps the person may still have them in his possession."

"Wait!" cried the Duke. "The only time that I wore these diamonds was at the King's ball a week ago, at Windsor. The Countess de Winter, with whom I was on bad terms, made it up with me at that ball. This reconciliation was the revenge of a jealous woman. Since that day I have not seen her. She is an agent of the Cardinal."

"Has he, then, agents all over the world?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Oh, yes!" said Buckingham, clenching his teeth with rage; "he is a terrible adversary. But when is this ball to take place?"

"Monday next."

"Monday next! There are five days left. That is longer than is necessary. Patrick!" called the Duke, opening the door, "Patrick!"

His confidential valet appeared.

"My jeweller and my secretary."

The valet left the room with a promptness and a silence which proved that he had contracted the habit of blind obedience.

Although it was the jeweller who had been called first, it was the secretary who first made his appearance. He found Buckingham seated before his table writing some orders with his own hand.

"Mr Jackson," he said, "you will take these orders to the Lord Chancellor, and tell him that I beg they may be executed at once."

"But, sir, if the Lord Chancellor questions me on the motives which have induced your Grace to take so extraordinary a measure, what shall I answer?"

"That such is my good pleasure, and that I have no account to render to anyone."

"Is that the answer which must be given to his Majesty, should he have the curiosity to ask why no vessel can leave the ports of England?"

"You are right, sir; he will tell the King in that case that I have decided upon war, and that this measure is my first act of hostility against France."

The secretary bowed and left.

"That is so much done," said Buckingham, turning to D'Artagnan. "If the aiguillettes have not already started for France, they can only arrive after you."

"How so?"

"I have just laid an embargo on all the ships in his Majesty's ports, and without my special permission not one of them will dare to weigh anchor."

D'Artagnan looked with astonishment at this man, who placed the unlimited power with which he was clothed by the confidence of his King at the service of his love-affairs.

Buckingham saw what was passing in the mind of the young man, and smiled.

"Yes," he said, "Anne of Austria is my real Queen; at a word from her I would betray my country, my King, my God. She asked me not to help the Protestants at La Rochelle, as I had promised, and I did not. Was I not largely paid for my obedience?—for to that obedience I owe her portrait."

D'Artagnan realized from what fragile and unknown threads the destiny of a nation and the lives of men often hang.

He was still deep in thought when the jeweller entered. He was an Irishman, well skilled in his trade, and who admitted that he had earned £100,000 a year from the Duke of Buckingham.

" Mr O'Reilly," said the Duke, " look at these aiguillettes, and tell me what they are worth apiece."

The jeweller examined them, and said without hesitation :

" Fifteen hundred pistoles each, my lord."

" How many days would it take to make two aiguillettes like these ? You see that two are missing."

" A week, my lord."

" I will pay three thousand pistoles apiece, and I must have them the day after to-morrow."

" My lord shall have them."

" You are an estimable man, Mr O'Reilly ; but that is not all. Those aiguillettes cannot be confided to anyone, they must be made in this palace."

" Impossible, my lord, for I alone can execute them in such a manner that no difference will be perceived between the new ones and the old."

" Therefore, my dear Mr O'Reilly, you are my prisoner. Let me know what workmen and what tools you require."

The jeweller knew the Duke, and was aware that it would be useless to remonstrate. He therefore made the best of it without demur.

" Will you permit me to inform my wife ? " he asked.

" Oh, you will even be permitted to see her, my dear Mr O'Reilly. Your captivity will be pleasant, and, as all inconvenience should have its recompense, here are one thousand pistoles beyond the price of the aiguillettes, to console you."

D'Artagnan could not recover from the surprise caused him by this Minister, who thus handled both men and millions.

As for the jeweller, he wrote to his wife, sending her the thousand pistoles, and directing her, in return, to send him his most skilful apprentice, a stock of diamonds, and the tools he required.

Buckingham took the jeweller into the room which was destined for him, and which in half an hour was transformed into a workshop. Then he put a sentinel at each door, with orders that no one was to enter but his valet Patrick. It is needless to add that O'Reilly and the apprentice were not to be allowed out upon any account.

This matter having been settled, the Duke returned to D'Artagnan.

" Now," he said, " my young friend, England is ours. What do you wish for ? "

" A bed," replied D'Artagnan ; " I stand more in need of that than of anything else, for the moment."

Buckingham gave D'Artagnan a room adjoining his own. He desired to keep the young man at hand—not that he distrusted him, but so as to have some one to speak to constantly about the Queen.

An hour later the order was issued in London prohibiting any vessel bound for France to leave port, not even the packet-boat. This was generally regarded as a declaration of war.

The next day but one, at eleven o'clock, the two diamond aiguillettes were finished, and so perfectly that Buckingham could not tell the new from the old; indeed, a person more skilled in such matters would have been deceived as he was. He immediately sent for D'Artagnan.

"Here," he said, "are the aiguillettes which you came in quest of, and bear witness that all that human power could accomplish I have done."

"Rest assured, my lord, that I will tell what I have seen; but your Grace has given me the jewels without the box."

"The box would only be in your way. Besides, the box is all the more precious to me now that it is all that I have left. You will say that I have kept it."

"I will deliver your message, word for word, my lord."

"And now," said Buckingham, looking steadily at the young man, "how can I acquit myself toward you?"

D'Artagnan flushed. He saw that the Duke was seeking for some means to make him accept something, and the idea that his blood and that of his companions should be paid for in English coin was extremely repugnant to him.

"Let us understand each other, my lord," replied D'Artagnan. "I am in the service of the King and Queen of France. I belong to the Guards of M. des Essarts, who, like his brother-in-law, M. de Tréville, is deeply attached to their Majesties. I have done all for the Queen, and nothing for your Grace; and perhaps I should not have acted at all were it not to be agreeable to some one who is to me what the Queen is to you."

"Yes," said the Duke, smiling; "I think I know that person; it is——"

"My lord, I have not named her," interrupted D'Artagnan quickly.

"That is true," said the Duke. "It is then to her that I should be grateful for your devotion?"

"As you say, my lord; for now that there is talk of war, I see in your Grace only an Englishman, and consequently an enemy, whom I would sooner meet in the field of battle than in

Windsor Park or a gallery of the Louvre. However, this will not hinder me from carrying out my mission, even at the risk of my life."

"We say, 'Proud as a Scotchman!'" murmured Buckingham.

"And we say, 'Proud as a Gascon!'" replied D'Artagnan. "The Gascons are the Scotch of France."

D'Artagnan bowed to the Duke, and prepared to start.

"Well! You are going like that? By what road? How?"

"Indeed, I had forgotten that England is an island, and that you are its king."

"Go to the port; ask for the brig *Sund*, and give this letter to the captain, who will take you to a small harbour where no one will expect you."

"That harbour is called?"

"Saint-Valery. But wait a moment. When you get there, you will enter a poor-looking inn, without either sign or name, the only one in the place."

"And then?"

"You will ask for the host, and say 'Forward.'"

"Which means?"

"'*En avant*'; that is the password. He will give you a horse, ready saddled, and will point out the road you should follow. You will find four relays on the road. If at each relay you leave your address in Paris, the horses will be sent after you. No matter how proud, you will not refuse to accept one for yourself, and to give one to each of your comrades. Besides, it is to make war against us. 'The end excuses the means,' as you Frenchmen say; do you not?"

"Yes, my lord; I accept, and, please God, we will make good use of your presents."

"Now, your hand, young man; we may meet soon on the field of battle; but, in the meantime, we will part good friends, I hope."

"Yes, my lord, but in the hope of soon becoming enemies."

D'Artagnan bowed to the Duke and made his way to the port as rapidly as possible. Opposite the Tower of London he found the brig, gave the letter to the captain, who had it endorsed by the Governor of the port, and sailed without delay.

Fifty vessels were waiting for leave to weigh anchor.

As they passed close to one of them, D'Artagnan thought that he recognized the lady of Meung, the same whom the unknown gentleman had called Milady, and whom D'Artagnan had found so beautiful.

The next day, at about nine in the morning, they reached Saint-Valery.

D'Artagnan immediately went to the inn which had been described to him, and recognized it without difficulty. War between France and England was being spoken of as impending and certain, and the sailors were feasting joyfully.

D'Artagnan pushed through the crowd, and advancing to the landlord, uttered the word "Forward." The landlord at once made him a sign to follow, took him to the stable, where a horse already saddled was waiting for him, and asked him if he required anything more.

"I wish to know the road I am to follow," said D'Artagnan.

"Go from here to Blangy, and thence to Neufchâtel. At Neufchâtel enter the inn of the Herse d'Or, give the password, and, as here, you will find a horse waiting for you."

"Do I owe anything?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Everything has been handsomely paid for," said the host. "Proceed on your way, and may God protect you."

"Amen!" replied the young man, and set off at a gallop.

Four hours later he was at Neufchâtel. He strictly followed the instructions he had received, and found a fresh horse waiting for him.

"Your address in Paris?"

"Hôtel des Gardes, company Des Essarts."

"Good," said the landlord.

"Which road must I take?"

"That to Rouen; but you will leave the town to your right. You will stop at the little village of Ecouis, where there is only one inn, the Ecu de France. You must not judge by appearances, you will find in the stable as good a horse as this."

"The same password?"

"Exactly."

"Good-bye, landlord."

"A good journey, sir! have you need of anything?"

D'Artagnan shook his head and resumed his journey at full speed: at Ecouis the same scene was repeated; he found the landlord just as civil, and a fresh horse. He left his address, and set out for Pontoise, at the same pace. At Pontoise he changed for the last time, and at nine o'clock he galloped into the courtyard of M. de Tréville. He had ridden nearly sixty leagues in twelve hours.

M. de Tréville received him as though he had seen him the same morning, only gripping his hand rather more cordially than

usual. He told D'Artagnan that M. des Essarts' company was on guard at the Louvre, and that he could go to his duty.

CHAPTER XXI

THE BALLET OF "LA MERLAISON"

THE next day nothing was talked of in Paris but the ball which the aldermen were going to give to the King and Queen, and in which their Majesties were to dance the famous ballet of "La Merlaison."

For a week past preparations had been going on at the Hôtel de Ville. The carpenters had set up platforms on which the ladies were to take their places; the grocers had furnished two hundred tapers of white wax, an unheard-of luxury for the period, and twenty fiddlers had been engaged, who were to receive double the ordinary price, as they were to play all night.

At midnight loud shouts and acclamations were heard; it was the King, who was passing through the streets leading from the Louvre, which were all illuminated with coloured lanterns.

The Aldermen in their robes, and preceded by six sergeants, bearing torches, went to meet the King on the steps, where an address of welcome was read by the Provost of the merchants, to which his Majesty replied, excusing himself for arriving so late, and throwing the blame on the Cardinal, who had detained him until eleven to discuss affairs of State.

Every one noticed that the King looked sad and preoccupied.

A tiring-room had been prepared for the King, and another for Monsieur. In each of these were masquerade dresses.

The same had been done for the Queen and for the wife of the First President.

The ladies and gentlemen in waiting were to dress two by two in rooms set apart for them.

Before entering his private room, the King gave orders that he should be informed directly the Cardinal arrived.

Half an hour afterward fresh acclamations were heard; they announced the arrival of the Queen, who was received as the King had been.

The Queen entered the hall, and it was observed that, like the King, she seemed sad, and, above all, fatigued.

At the moment she entered, the curtain of a little tribune,

which had, until then, remained closed, was drawn aside, and there was seen to appear the pale face of the Cardinal, who was dressed as a Spanish cavalier. His eyes were fixed on those of the Queen, and a smile of infernal joy passed over his lips: the Queen had not her diamond aiguillettes.

The Queen remained for some time receiving the compliments of the gentlemen of the city, and returning the salutations of the ladies.

Suddenly the King appeared with the Cardinal at one of the doors of the hall. The Cardinal was speaking in a low tone, and the King was exceedingly pale.

The King made his way through the crowd without a mask, the ribbons of his doublet hardly tied; he approached the Queen, and said in an ominous voice:

"Madame, why have you not put on your diamond aiguillettes, when you know that it would have given me pleasure to see them?"

The Queen looked round and saw behind her the Cardinal, who smiled a diabolical smile.

"Sire!" replied the Queen, "because I feared that in the midst of this large crowd some accident might happen to them."

"You were wrong, madame! If I made you that present it was in order that you should adorn yourself with them. I tell you that you have done wrong."

And the voice of the King trembled with rage; every one looked and listened with astonishment, not understanding what was passing.

"Sire," said the Queen, "I can send for them to the Louvre, where they are, and thus the wishes of your Majesty will be accomplished."

"Do so, madame; do so as soon as possible, for in an hour the ballet will commence."

The Queen bowed in sign of submission, and followed the ladies who were to conduct her to her room.

On his side the King returned to his own.

There was a moment of confusion in the hall, for every one had observed that something had happened between the King and the Queen. But both had spoken very low, every one, by respect, had retired some paces, and so no one had heard what had passed.

The fiddlers played with all their might, but no one listened to them.

The King left his room first. He was in an elegant hunting

costume, and Monsieur and the other nobles were dressed like him.

The Cardinal approached the King and handed him a box.

The King opened it and found two diamond aiguillettes.

"What does that mean?" asked the King.

"Nothing; only, if the Queen has the aiguillettes, which I doubt, count them, Sire, and if you find only ten, ask her Majesty who could have taken these two."

The King looked at the Cardinal as if to question him, but he had no time. A cry of admiration issued from every mouth. If the King looked the first gentleman of his kingdom, the Queen was assuredly the loveliest woman in France.

It is true that her hunting costume became her admirably; she wore a felt hat with blue feathers, a cloak of pearl-grey velvet looped up with diamond clasps; and a skirt of blue satin, embroidered with silver. On her left shoulder sparkled the aiguillettes, fastened by a ribbon of the same colour as the feathers and the skirt.

The King trembled with delight and the Cardinal with rage; however, as they were at some distance from the Queen, they could not count the aiguillettes. The Queen had them, but had she ten or twelve?

At this moment the violins struck up the signal for the ballet. The King advanced toward Madame la Présidente, with whom he was to dance, and his Highness Monsieur[1] toward the Queen. They took their places, and the ballet began.

The King danced opposite the Queen, and each time that he passed her he looked eagerly at the aiguillettes, which he was unable to count. A cold sweat covered the forehead of the Cardinal.

The ballet lasted an hour, and terminated amid general applause; each gentleman led his lady to a seat, but the King, taking advantage of the privilege he enjoyed, left his partner to go to the Queen.

"I thank you, madame," he said, "for the deference you have shown to my wishes; but I think that there are two aiguillettes missing, and I bring them to you."

"How, Sire!" cried the young Queen, feigning surprise; "you give me two more? Why, that will make fourteen."

As a matter of fact, when the King counted the aiguillettes, he found twelve on the shoulder of her Majesty.

The King called the Cardinal.

[1] The King's eldest brother.—TRANSLATOR.

"Well, what does this mean?" he asked, in a severe tone.

"It means, Sire, that I wished to offer these two jewels to her Majesty, and not daring to do so myself, I adopted this plan."

"I am all the more grateful to your Eminence," replied Anne of Austria, with a smile which showed that she was not the dupe of this ingenious gallantry, "because I am sure that they must have cost you as much as the twelve others cost his Majesty."

Then, bowing to the King and the Cardinal, she retired.

The attention we have been obliged to bestow on the illustrious persons we have been dealing with has made us neglect for a moment him to whom Anne of Austria owed the unheard-of triumph she had just gained over the Cardinal, and who, ignored and lost in the crowd, looked on at this scene, which was comprehensible for four persons only—the King, the Queen, his Eminence, and himself.

The Queen had just regained her chamber; and D'Artagnan was about to withdraw, when he was touched lightly on the shoulder; he turned and saw a young woman, who made a sign to him to follow her. Although her face was covered by a black velvet mask he at once recognized his usual light-footed and witty guide, Madame Bonacieux.

The evening before they had hardly seen each other in the lodge of Germain, so anxious was the young woman to carry to the Queen the welcome news of the return of her messenger. D'Artagnan therefore followed Madame Bonacieux, impelled by a double feeling, love and curiosity.

As the galleries became more deserted D'Artagnan wished to detain the young woman, but with the agility of a bird she slipped through his hands; and when he wished to speak to her, her finger placed on her lips with an imperative gesture, full of charm, reminded him that he was in the service of one to whom he must render blind obedience without complaining.

After many turns and windings Madame Bonacieux opened a door and introduced the young man into a room entirely dark. There, she made him another sign to be silent, and opening a second door, hidden in the tapestry, disappeared into a blaze of light.

D'Artagnan remained motionless, asking himself where he was, but soon a ray of light which penetrated into the room, the warm and perfumed air which reached him, the conversation of two or three ladies, in language at once respectful and refined, the word Majesty several times repeated, showed him clearly that he was in a room adjoining that of the Queen.

The young man remained in the dark and waited.

The Queen appeared gay and happy, which seemed greatly to astonish the persons who surrounded her, and who were accustomed to see her thoughtful. The Queen attributed this joyous feeling to the beauty of the *fête*, the pleasure which the ballet had given her, and as it was not permitted to contradict her, every one extolled the gallantry of the aldermen of Paris.

Although D'Artagnan did not know the Queen, he soon distinguished her voice, first by the slight foreign accent, then by that tone of command which naturally characterizes the words of a sovereign. He heard her draw near to and go away from the open door, and two or three times he even saw the shadow of her form intercept the light.

At last, suddenly, an adorable hand and arm were thrust through the tapestry. D'Artagnan understood that this was his reward; he flung himself on his knees, seized the hand, and pressed it respectfully to his lips; then this hand was withdrawn, leaving in his what he recognized as a ring; the door was immediately closed, and D'Artagnan found himself once more in complete darkness.

He put the ring on his finger and again waited; it was evident that all was not yet over. After the reward of his devotion came the reward of his love. Besides, though the ballet was danced, the festivities had hardly begun. There was to be supper at three o'clock, and a quarter to three had just struck.

By degrees the noise of voices diminished in the neighbouring room, and became more and more distant; then the door of the room in which D'Artagnan was concealed opened, and Madame Bonacieux darted in.

"You, at last!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Silence!" said the young woman, placing her hand on the lips of the young man; "silence! and go away by the way you came."

"But when and where shall I see you?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"A note which you will find on returning home will tell you. Go, go!"

And with these words she opened the door of the gallery, and pushed D'Artagnan out of the room.

D'Artagnan obeyed like a child, without resistance, and without making any objection, which proves that he was really in love.

CHAPTER XXII

THE RENDEZVOUS

D'ARTAGNAN ran home, and although it was three o'clock in the morning, and he had several of the worst quarters of Paris to pass, he met with no harm. It is well known that there is a god for drunkards and lovers.

He found the door of his alley on the jar, ascended the stairs, and knocked gently in a manner agreed upon with his lackey. Planchet opened the door.

"Has anyone brought a letter for me?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No one has brought a letter, sir, but one came of itself."

"What do you mean, dolt?"

"I mean that on entering, although I had the key in my pocket, I found a letter on the table of your bedroom."

"And where is the letter?"

"I left it where it was, sir. It is not natural for letters to enter thus. Everything was hermetically shut, and there must be some magic in this affair."

The young Guard darted into his room and opened the letter, which ran thus:

> The most sincere thanks are to be transmitted to you. Be at Saint-Cloud this evening about ten o'clock, in front of the pavilion built at the angle of the house of M. d'Estrées.
>
> C. B.

On reading this letter D'Artagnan felt his heart dilated and contracted by that spasm which at the same time tortures and gladdens the hearts of all lovers.

This was the first note he had ever received, the first rendezvous granted to him. His heart, intoxicated with joy, seemed on the point of breaking at the threshold of that earthly paradise called love.

D'Artagnan read and re-read his *billet doux*; then he kissed and kissed again the lines traced by his lovely mistress. At last he went to bed, fell asleep, and had golden dreams. At seven in the morning he rose and called Planchet, who, at the second summons, opened the door, his face still betraying his uneasiness of the night before.

"Planchet," said D'Artagnan, "I shall be out all day, so you are free until seven this evening, when I wish you to be ready with two horses."

" There, now ! " said Planchet ; " it seems that we are going to have our skins holed again ! "

As D'Artagnan went out, M. Bonacieux was at the door ; he meant to pass by without speaking to the worthy mercer, but the latter made so polite a bow that his lodger was forced to answer it, and also to enter into conversation.

Then he was bound to show some condescension toward a husband whose wife has given you a rendezvous in the park of Saint-Cloud for that very evening. D'Artagnan accosted him in the pleasantest manner. The conversation naturally fell upon the incarceration of the unfortunate man.

Bonacieux, who was not aware that D'Artagnan had heard the conversation with the man of Meung, related to his lodger all the persecutions of that monster Laffemas, whom he never ceased calling the executioner of the Cardinal. He dwelt at length on the Bastille, the bolts, the wickets, the air-holes, the gratings, and the instruments of torture.

D'Artagnan listened with exemplary complacency ; and when he had finished, said :

" And Madame Bonacieux, do you know who carried her off ? For I cannot forget that it was owing to that unfortunate circumstance that I had the pleasure of making your acquaintance."

" Ah ! " said M. Bonacieux, " they took care not to tell me ; and my wife, on her side, swears by all that is holy that she does not know. But you," continued Bonacieux, in the most amiable way, " where have you been for the last few days ? I have seen neither you nor your friends."

" My friends and I have been on a little journey."

" Far from here ? "

" Oh, no ! about forty leagues only. We went to take Athos to the waters of Forges, where my friends have remained."

" And you have returned, have you not ? " added Bonacieux slyly. " A handsome fellow like you cannot obtain long furloughs from his mistress ; and you were impatiently expected in Paris, were you not ? "

" On my word," said the young man, laughing, " I acknowledge it all the more readily, my dear M. Bonacieux, since I see that one can hide nothing from you. Yes, I was awaited, and with great impatience."

A slight cloud passed over the brow of Bonacieux, but so slight that D'Artagnan did not notice it.

" And we are going to be rewarded for our diligence ? " continued the mercer, with a slight change of voice, which D'Artagnan

no more observed than the passing cloud which a moment before had darkened the face of the worthy man.

" Ah, wouldn't you like to know ? " said D'Artagnan, laughing.

" No ; what I say is only to know if you will be home late."

" Why this question, my dear landlord ? Do you intend sitting up for me ? "

" No ; but since my arrest, and the theft committed in the house, I am frightened each time I hear a door open, and especially at night. What would you have ?—I am not a man of the sword ! "

" Well, do not be frightened if I come home at one, two, or three in the morning, nor must you feel alarmed if I do not return at all."

This time Bonacieux became so pale that D'Artagnan could not help noticing it, and asking him what was the matter :

" Nothing," replied Bonacieux ; " nothing. Since my misfortunes I am subject to sudden faintness, and I just had a shiver ; pay no attention to it, you who have nothing to do but to be happy."

" Then I have plenty to do ! "

" Not yet ; wait, you said this evening."

" Well, this evening will come, thank goodness ; and perhaps you expect it with as much impatience as I do ! Perhaps this evening Madame Bonacieux will visit the conjugal roof."

" Madame Bonacieux is not free this evening," replied gravely the husband ; " she is on duty at the Louvre."

" So much the worse for you, my dear host. When I am happy I like to know that every one else is ; but it seems that this is not possible."

And the young man went away roaring with laughter at the joke which he thought that he alone could understand.

" Enjoy yourself," replied Bonacieux, in a sepulchral voice.

But D'Artagnan was already too far off to hear, nor, had he heard, would he have paid any attention in his present state of mind.

He went first to the *hôtel* of M. de Tréville, for his visit the evening before had been but a short one. He found M. de Tréville greatly pleased, for both the King and the Queen had been charming to him at the ball. It is true that the Cardinal had been terribly sulky, and at one in the morning had retired, on the pretence that he was indisposed. As for their Majesties, they had not returned to the Louvre until six o'clock.

" Now," said M. de Tréville, lowering his voice, and looking

round to see if they were quite alone ; " now speak of yourself, my young friend, for it is evident that your fortunate return has something to do with the joy of the King, the triumph of the Queen, and the humiliation of his Eminence. You must keep a sharp look-out."

" What have I to fear," replied D'Artagnan, " so long as I enjoy the favour of their Majesties ? "

" Everything, believe me. The Cardinal is not a man to forget a trick played upon him until he has squared accounts with the person who played it, and that person seems to be a certain Gascon of my acquaintance."

" Do you think that the Cardinal knows as much as you, and that I have been to London ? "

" *Diable !* You have been to London ! Is it from London that you brought back the splendid diamond which glitters on your finger ? Take care, my dear D'Artagnan, it is not well to accept presents from the enemy. Is there not a Latin verse which says :

Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes."

" This diamond does not come from the enemy, sir, but from the Queen."

And D'Artagnan related what had happened.

" Oh ! women, women ! " cried the old soldier, " how well I recognize their romantic imagination ; whatever is mysterious charms them. Thus, you saw only the arm ; and if you were to meet the Queen you would not know her, and were she to meet you she would not recognize you."

" No ; but thanks to this diamond——"

" Listen," said M. de Tréville ; " allow me to give you some good and friendly advice."

" You will do me a great honour, sir."

" Well, go to the first jeweller's shop and sell that diamond. Pistoles have no name, but this ring has a terrible one, and may betray the person who wears it."

" Sell this ring ! a ring that comes from my sovereign ! Never ! "

" Then turn it round and hide the stone, poor madman, for it is well known that a cadet from Gascony does not find such gems in his mother's jewel-case."

" You think, then, that I have reason to fear something ? " asked D'Artagnan.

" I mean, young man, that he who goes to sleep on a mine when the match is lighted is safe in comparison to you."

"*Diable!*" cried D'Artagnan, who was getting uneasy. "What must be done?"

"Remain always on your guard. The Cardinal has a tenacious memory and a long arm. Believe me, he will play you some trick. The least you may expect is to be arrested."

"What! he would dare to arrest a man in the service of the King?"

"*Pardieu!* there was no difficulty made about Athos. At all events believe a man who has been thirty years at Court, do not go to sleep, or you will be lost. See enemies everywhere; if they try to pick a quarrel with you, avoid it; if they attack you, beat a retreat without shame; if you cross a bridge, feel the planks; if you remain out late, make your lackey follow you, and let him be armed. Distrust every one, your friend, your brother, your mistress—especially your mistress."

D'Artagnan flushed.

"My mistress," he repeated mechanically, "and why her more than another?"

"Because the mistress is one of the favourite instruments of the Cardinal. He has none more expeditious. A woman sells you for ten pistoles; witness Dalila. You know the Scriptures?"

D'Artagnan thought of his rendezvous; but we must say, to the credit of our hero, that M. de Tréville's bad opinion of women in general did not inspire him with the least suspicion of his pretty hostess.

"But *à propos*," added M. de Tréville, "what has become of your three companions?"

"I was going to ask you if you had any news of them?"

"None."

"Well, I left them on the road: Porthos at Chantilly, with a duel on his hands; Aramis at Crèvecœur, with a bullet in his shoulder, and Athos at Amiens, accused of uttering false money."

"And how did you escape?"

"By a miracle, sir, with a sword-thrust in the breast, and by pinning the Comte de Wardes on the Calais road like a butterfly on tapestry."

"There! you see! De Wardes, a creature of the Cardinal; a cousin of Rochefort. Look here, my dear fellow, I've got an idea."

"Speak, sir."

"In your place, this is what I should do: While his Eminence is looking for you in Paris, you should, without trumpeting it

abroad, take the road to Picardy, and try to obtain news of your friends. *Que diable !* they deserve this little attention."

"Your advice, sir, is good, and I will start to-morrow."

"To-morrow ! and why not to-day ? "

"This evening I am detained in Paris by an indispensable affair."

"Ah ! young man, young man, some flirtation. Take care, I repeat ; it is through woman that we were lost, and through whom we shall be lost again. Believe me, and start this evening."

"Impossible, sir."

"You have, then, pledged your word ? "

"Yes, sir."

"That is another matter ; but promise me that if you are not killed to-night you will start to-morrow."

"I promise you."

"Well, a good journey."

"Thanks, sir," said D'Artagnan, who took leave of M. de Tréville, much touched by his paternal solicitude for his musketeers.

He called and enquired, first for Athos, then for Porthos, and finally for Aramis. None of them had returned, and their lackeys also were absent.

Passing before the *hôtel* of the Guards, he cast an eye into the stables ; three out of the four horses had already arrived. Planchet, quite bewildered, had already finished grooming two of them.

"Ah ! sir," he said, on perceiving D'Artagnan, "I am very glad to see you."

"And why so, Planchet ? "

"Have you confidence in M. Bonacieux, our landlord ? "

"I ? not the least in the world."

"Ah ! you are quite right, sir."

"But whence this question ? "

"While you were speaking to him I watched you without listening, sir ; his face changed colour two or three times."

"*Bah !* "

"You, sir, thinking of nothing but the letter you had received, did not notice it. I, on the contrary, did not lose a movement of his features."

"And you found it—— ? "

"Treacherous, sir."

"Indeed ! "

"What is more, as soon as you had turned the corner, M. Bonacieux took his hat, closed the door, and ran away down the opposite street."

"You are right, Planchet, all that looks suspicious; but be easy, we will not pay our rent until this has been explained."

"You are joking, sir, but you will see."

"What would you, Planchet? what will be, will be."

"You will not give up your jaunt this evening, sir?"

"On the contrary, Planchet, the more I am annoyed with M. Bonacieux, the more I am determined to keep my appointment."

"Then if that is your decision——"

"Unshakable, my friend. Therefore be ready at nine, and I will come for you."

Planchet, seeing that there was no hope that his master would give up his project, heaved a deep sigh, and began to rub down the third horse.

As for D'Artagnan, being naturally a man of great prudence, instead of returning to his own house, he went and dined with the Gascon priest, who, when the four friends were in distress, had given them a chocolate breakfast.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE PAVILION

AT nine o'clock D'Artagnan was at the *hôtel* of the Guards; he found Planchet under arms. The fourth horse had arrived. D'Artagnan had his sword, and stuck two pistols in his belt; they both mounted, and rode away without noise. They crossed the quays, and issuing by the gate De la Conférence, took the road to Saint-Cloud.

After proceeding some distance, D'Artagnan alighted from his horse, threw the bridle over Planchet's arm, and strode away rapidly, wrapping his cloak round him.

"Brrr! It is cold!" exclaimed Planchet, as soon as he had lost sight of his master, and in his hurry to get warm he hastened to knock at the door of a house adorned with all the attributes of a suburban wineshop.

D'Artagnan, who had taken a cross-road, soon reached Saint-Cloud; but instead of following the High Street, he took a deserted alley, and was soon opposite the pavilion which had been described. It was situated in a lonely spot.

As he had not been told to announce his arrival by any signal, he waited. No noise was to be heard; he might have been a hundred leagues from the capital

D'Artagnan, after looking behind him, leaned against the hedge of a garden at the bottom of which was a small cabin.

A dark mist, through which a few lights shone, enveloped Paris in its gloomy folds.

But to D'Artagnan everything assumed a pleasant form; all his thoughts had a smile, and the darkness became transparent. The hour of the rendezvous was about to strike.

Indeed, after a few moments the belfry of Saint-Cloud gave forth ten strokes from its wide-mouthed bell. There was something lugubrious in this voice of bronze, lamenting thus in the middle of the night. But each of the strokes which made up the total expected vibrated harmoniously in the heart of the young man, whose eyes were fixed on the little pavilion situated at the angle of the wall, all the windows of which were closed with shutters, with the exception of one on the first floor. Through this window shone a soft light, which silvered the trembling foliage of two or three linden trees. It was evidently behind that little window that the pretty Madame Bonacieux was waiting for him.

Happy in this belief, D'Artagnan waited patiently for half an hour, his eyes fixed upon the charming dwelling; a portion of the ceiling with its gilded mouldings, which he could perceive, spoke for the elegance of the abode.

Half-past ten sounded from the belfry of Saint-Cloud. This time, without D'Artagnan knowing why, a shiver ran through his body. Perhaps he was getting cold, and mistook a physical impression for a mental one.

Then it occurred to him that he had misread the letter, and that the rendezvous was for eleven.

He approached the window, placed himself in a ray of light, drew the letter from his pocket and read it again; he was not mistaken, the rendezvous was for ten o'clock.

He went and resumed his post, beginning to feel rather uneasy at this silence and solitude. Eleven o'clock struck. D'Artagnan now began really to fear that something had happened to Madame Bonacieux. He clapped his hands three times, the ordinary signal of lovers, but no one answered; not even an echo. Then he thought with a certain amount of annoyance that the young woman had fallen asleep while waiting for him.

He approached the wall and tried to escalade it; but it had been recently plastered, and he could obtain no hold. He next thought of the trees, and that from the branches of one of them he might see into the pavilion. The tree offered no difficulty.

Now D'Artagnan was hardly twenty years old. In an instant

he was in the middle of the branches, and through the transparent windows darted his eyes into the interior of the pavilion.

The sight which met his gaze made D'Artagnan shudder from head to foot. The soft light, the calm lamp, lighted up a scene of fearful disorder ; one of the window-panes was broken, the door of the room had been forced in and was hanging on its hinges ; a table, on which an elegant supper had been spread, was lying on the ground ; the decanters were smashed to atoms, the ground was strewn with crushed fruit ; everything bespoke a violent and desperate struggle. D'Artagnan thought that he could even discern amid that strange disorder shreds of clothing, and blood-stains on the tablecloth and the curtains.

He hastened to descend, his heart beating horribly, to see if he could discover any further traces of violence. The gentle light still shone in the tranquil night.

D'Artagnan then perceived what he had not before remarked, that the soil presented confused traces of having been trampled by men and horses. Moreover, the wheels of a carriage that seemed to have come from Paris, had made a deep rut in the soft ground and had then turned again in the direction of Paris.

At last D'Artagnan, pursuing his research, found the torn glove of a woman near the wall. This glove, where it had not touched the muddy soil, was irreproachably fresh ; it was one of those perfumed gloves which a lover likes to tear from a pretty hand.

By degrees, as D'Artagnan continued his investigations, more abundant and more icy sweat beaded his forehead, a horrible anguish oppressed his heart ; and he panted for breath, yet he tried to reassure himself with the thought that perhaps this pavilion had nothing to do with Madame Bonacieux ; that the young woman had given him a rendezvous in front of the pavilion, and not in the pavilion ; that perhaps she had been detained in Paris by her duty or through the jealousy of her husband.

But all his reasoning was overthrown and destroyed by the intimate feeling of pain which on certain occasions seizes upon our whole being, and cries to us that a great misfortune is hovering over our head.

Then D'Artagnan went almost out of his mind ; he ran along the high road till he came to the ferry and questioned the ferryman, who said that about seven o'clock a young woman in a black mantle, who evidently wished not to be known, had crossed the river. For this very reason he had looked at her with particular attention and had observed that she was young and pretty.

There were then, as now, many young and pretty women who

went to Saint-Cloud, and who wished not to be recognized; but D'Artagnan did not doubt for a moment that it was Madame Bonacieux who had been noticed by the ferryman. Everything concurred to prove to D'Artagnan that his presentiments did not deceive him, and that a great tragedy had been enacted.

He ran back once more, thinking that perhaps during his absence something might have occurred at the pavilion. He found the alley still deserted, and the same calm and soft light gleaming from the window.

D'Artagnan then bethought himself of that blind and silent cabin, which had no doubt seen, and which perhaps might speak. The garden gate was closed, but he jumped over the hedge, and in spite of the barking of the chained dog, approached the cabin. No one answered his first knock. The silence of death reigned here as in the pavilion; however, as the cabin was his last resource, he persevered. Soon it seemed to him that he heard a slight noise within—a timid noise, and which appeared to be afraid to make itself heard.

Then D'Artagnan ceased knocking, and implored with an accent so full of anxiety and coaxing that his voice would have reassured the most timid. At last an old worm-eaten shutter was opened; it closed again as soon as the light of a wretched lamp fell on the hilt of D'Artagnan's sword. However, in spite of the rapidity of the movement, D'Artagnan had had time to see the head of an old man.

"In the name of Heaven!" he cried, "listen to me; I was waiting for some one who has not come; I am dying of anxiety. Has any catastrophe taken place in the neighbourhood? Speak!"

The window was reopened slowly, and the same face reappeared; only this time it was even paler than before.

D'Artagnan told his story with simplicity; without mentioning names, he related how he had a rendezvous with a young woman in front of the pavilion, and how, not seeing her arrive, he had climbed a linden, and by the light of a lamp had seen the disorder in the room.

The old man listened attentively, and when D'Artagnan had finished, he shook his head in an ominous manner.

"What do you mean?" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "In the name of Heaven, explain yourself!"

"Oh, sir!" replied the old man, "do not ask me anything, for if I were to tell you what I have seen, some evil would surely befall me."

"Then you have seen something?" rejoined D'Artagnan.

" In that case, in the name of Heaven," he continued, throwing him a pistole, " tell me what you have seen ; and on the faith of a gentleman, not one of your words shall leave my heart."

The old man read so much frankness and grief in the face of D'Artagnan that he made a sign to him to listen, and said in a low voice :

" It was nearly nine o'clock when I heard a noise in the street, and wishing to know what it might be, I went to my door. Some men were trying to enter. As I am poor, and have no fear of being robbed, I opened and saw three men a few paces away. In the shadow was a carriage, and some horses, evidently belonging to the three men, who were dressed as gentlemen.

" ' Ah, my good sirs, what do you want ? ' I cried.

" ' Have you a ladder ? ' said he who appeared to be the leader.

" ' Yes, sir ; I have got one to gather my fruit.'

" ' Give it to us, and re-enter your cabin ; here is a crown for your trouble—only remember, that if you say a word of anything you may see or hear, you are a lost man."

" When they had shut the garden gate I pretended to enter the house, but getting into the shade, I made my way to yonder clump of elder, from which I could see everything without being seen. The three men brought up the carriage without noise, and took out a small stout man with grizzled hair, shabbily dressed in dark clothing, who mounted the ladder cautiously, looked craftily into the window, descended silently, and murmured in a low voice :

" ' It is she ! '

" The man who had spoken to me at once approached the door of the pavilion, opened it with a key, and disappeared within. Meantime, the other two men climbed the ladder. Suddenly there was a sound of loud screaming, a woman ran to the window and opened it as if to jump out ; but as soon as she saw the two men she darted back ; the two men leapt into the room after her. Then I saw nothing more, but heard the noise of furniture being smashed. The woman screamed for help. But soon her cries were stifled ; the three men appeared at the window carrying the woman in their arms, they bore her to the carriage, and the little old man got in with her. The carriage then drove off at a gallop, and all was over. From that moment I have seen nothing and heard nothing."

D'Artagnan, crushed by this terrible news, remained silent and motionless, while all the demons of rage and jealousy howled in his heart.

"But, sir," said the old man, more touched by this mute despair than by cries and tears, "do not be disconsolate; they have not killed her, that is the main thing."

"Have you any idea who the man was who led this infernal expedition?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I do not know him."

"Since he spoke to you, you must have seen him."

"He was a tall, swarthy man, with black moustaches, dark eyes, and a noble appearance."

"That is the man!" exclaimed D'Artagnan; "always the same! It is my evil genius. And the other?"

"Which other?"

"The little man."

"Oh! he was not a noble, I can answer for that; besides, he did not wear a sword, and the others treated him without respect."

"Some lackey," murmured D'Artagnan. "Ah! poor woman—poor woman! what have they done with her?"

"You promised secrecy," said the old man.

"And I renew my promise; do not be uneasy, I am a gentleman."

D'Artagnan, broken-hearted, took once more the road to the ferry.

It was nearly midnight, and it was necessary to discover Planchet. D'Artagnan inquired at all the wineshops where he saw a light, but without success. At the sixth he reflected that the search was useless, as he had given his servant rendezvous for six in the morning. Besides, it occurred to him that by remaining in the neighbourhood of the place where the event had occurred, he might learn something which would clear up the mystery. At the sixth wineshop, therefore, D'Artagnan sat down, called for a bottle of wine of the best quality, ensconced himself in the most obscure corner, and made up his mind to wait for dawn; but once more his hopes were dashed, and although he listened attentively he heard nothing but oaths, jests, and insults between the workmen, the lackeys, and the carters, who composed the honourable society present; nothing about the unfortunate woman who had been carried off. D'Artagnan was therefore obliged, after having finished his bottle, for want of something to do, and so as not to arouse suspicion, to seek the most comfortable posture possible and to sleep as best he could.

About six in the morning D'Artagnan awoke with the uncomfortable feeling which one usually experiences at daybreak after

having passed a bad night. He was not long making his toilette; he felt to see if he had not been robbed during his sleep, and having found his diamond ring on his finger, his purse in his pocket, and his pistols in his belt, he got up, paid for his bottle, and went out to see if he would have more luck in searching for his lackey than the night before. Indeed, the first thing which he perceived through the damp grey mist was the honest Planchet, who was holding two horses at the door of a shabby little wineshop which D'Artagnan had passed without suspecting its existence.

CHAPTER XXIV

PORTHOS

INSTEAD of returning home at once, D'Artagnan alighted at the door of M. de Tréville and rapidly ascended the stair. This time he made up his mind to tell him everything which had happened. He would no doubt give him good advice; then, as M. de Tréville almost daily saw the Queen, he might obtain from her Majesty some information concerning the poor woman who was no doubt paying for her devotion to her mistress.

M. de Tréville listened to the story of the young man with a gravity which proved that he saw something in this adventure beyond a love intrigue; then, when D'Artagnan had finished:

"H'm!" he said. "All this savours of his Eminence a league off."

"But what is to be done?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing at present but to leave Paris, as I told you, as soon as possible. I will see the Queen and give her the details of the disappearance of this poor woman, of which she is no doubt ignorant; these details will guide her, for her part, and on your return I shall perhaps have some good news to give you. Have confidence in me."

D'Artagnan knew that, although a Gascon, M. de Tréville was not accustomed to make rash promises, and that when he did promise he kept his word. So he saluted him, full of gratitude for the past and for the future; and the worthy Captain, who on his side took a lively interest in this young man, so brave and determined, pressed his hand affectionately, and wished him a good journey.

Resolved to put the advice of M. de Tréville at once into practice, D'Artagnan took his way to the Rue des Fossoyeurs, to look

after his portmanteau. As he approached the house he saw M. Bonacieux in morning costume standing at the door.

All that the prudent Planchet had said the evening before respecting the sinister character of his host recurred to his mind, and he examined him more attentively than he had ever done before. In addition to a certain yellow bilious look, which might be accidental, D'Artagnan remarked something extremely perfidious in the wrinkles of his face. It appeared to him that M. Bonacieux wore a mask, and that his mask was very disagreeable to behold.

Consequently, moved by his repugnance for this man, he was about to pass him without speaking, when, as on the previous evening, M. Bonacieux hailed him.

"Well, young man," he said, "it seems that we pass fine nights! Seven o'clock in the morning, *peste!* It appears to me that you rather reverse established customs, and that you return home when others are going out!"

"One cannot address the same reproach to you, M. Bonacieux, and you are the model of well-conducted persons. It is true that when you possess a young and pretty wife you don't need to run after happiness; it is happiness which comes to you; is it not so, M. Bonacieux?"

Bonacieux became as pale as death and grimaced a smile.

"Ah!" he said, "you *are* funny. But where the devil have you been spending the night, my young master? Surely the cross-roads are very bad."

D'Artagnan glanced down at his boots, which were covered with mud. At the same time his eyes fell on the shoes and stockings of the mercer; one would have said that he had dipped them in the same mire; the one and the other were splashed with similar stains.

Then a sudden idea flashed through the mind of D'Artagnan. That small, stout man, with grizzled hair, that kind of lackey, treated without any respect by the men wearing swords, who composed the escort, was Bonacieux himself. The husband had presided over the abduction of his wife.

D'Artagnan felt a frantic desire to seize the mercer by the throat and to strangle him; but, as we have said, he was extremely prudent, and he refrained. However, the change in his countenance was so visible that Bonacieux was frightened, and recoiled a pace.

"Why! you who joke, my good man," said D'Artagnan, "it seems to me that if my boots need the sponge, your shoes and

stockings require the brush. Can it be that you also were amusing yourself, M. Bonacieux? *Diable!* that would not be pardonable in a man of your age, and who, what is more, has such a young and pretty wife as you have."

"Oh, *mon Dieu*, no!" said Bonacieux, "but yesterday I went to Saint-Mandé about a servant, and as the roads were bad, I brought home all this mud."

The place mentioned by Bonacieux confirmed the suspicions of D'Artagnan. Bonacieux had said Saint-Mandé because Saint-Mandé was on the very opposite side of Paris to Saint-Cloud. This probability afforded him some consolation, for if the mercer knew where his wife was, it would always be possible, by employing extreme measures, to force him to divulge the secret. But the probability must be changed into a certainty.

"Pardon, my dear Bonacieux, if I treat you without ceremony," said D'Artagnan, "but nothing makes one so dry as want of sleep. I am therefore terribly thirsty. Let me take a glass of water in your apartment; as a neighbour, you cannot refuse."

And without awaiting the permission of his landlord, D'Artagnan entered the house, and threw a rapid glance at the bed. It had not been slept in. Bonacieux had only just returned; he had accompanied his wife to the place where she had been taken.

"Thanks, M. Bonacieux," said D'Artagnan, emptying a glass; "that is all I want. Now I am going to my room to make Planchet clean my boots, and when he has done I will send him to brush your shoes if you like."

And he left the mercer, who was quite bewildered at this singular parting adieu, and who began to wonder whether he had not given himself away.

D'Artagnan found Planchet on the landing quite distracted.

"Ah, sir!" he cried, "here is another affair, and I was very anxious for you to come back."

"What is the matter, then?"

"Oh, you will never guess from whom I have received a visit in your absence."

"When?"

"Half an hour ago, while you were with M. de Tréville."

"Who was it, then? Come, speak out."

"M. de Cavois."

"The Captain of the Cardinal's Guards?"

"Himself."

"He came to arrest me?"

" He came, he said, from his Eminence, who wished you well, and begged you to follow him to the Palais Royal."

" And what did you reply ? "

" That this was impossible, since you were not at home, as he could see for himself."

" And what did he say to that ? "

" That you must not fail to present yourself in the course of the day ; then he added in a low voice : ' Tell your master that his Eminence is well disposed toward him, and that his fortune may depend on this interview.' "

" The snare is a clumsy one for the Cardinal."

" So I thought, and said that you would be filled with despair on your return."

" ' Where has he gone ? ' asked M. de Cavois.

" ' To Troyes, in Champagne,' I replied.

" ' And when did he start ? '

" ' Yesterday evening.' "

" Planchet, my friend," interrupted D'Artagnan, " you are a precious man."

" You understand, sir, that I thought that if you wished to see M. de Cavois you could easily contradict me, and as I am not a gentleman I may tell lies."

" Reassure yourself, Planchet ; you will keep your reputation for being a man of veracity ; we shall start in a quarter of an hour."

" That is the advice I was going to give you, sir. Where are we going, if I may make bold to ask ? "

" *Pardieu !* In the opposite direction to that which you said. Besides, are you not as anxious to have news of Grimaud, Mousqueton, and Bazin as I am of Athos, Porthos, and Aramis ? "

" Yes, sir ; and I will be ready as soon as you wish ; the air of the country is better than that of Paris just now. Therefore——"

" Therefore pack up and we will start. I will go on first, with my hands in my pockets, so that no one may suspect anything. You will join me at the *hôtel* of the Guards. By the way, Planchet, I think that you are right as regards our host, and that he is a thorough scoundrel ! "

" Ah ! you may believe me, sir, when I tell you anything—I am a good judge of faces."

D'Artagnan went down first, and by way of precaution made a last call at the dwellings of his three friends ; no news of any of them had been received ; only a perfumed letter in a small elegant

handwriting had arrived for Aramis. D'Artagnan took charge of it.

Ten minutes later he was joined by Planchet. He had already saddled his own horse, and he directed Planchet to saddle the other three.

"Do you think that we shall go faster, sir, with two horses apiece?" asked Planchet, with a sly air.

"No, though you think yourself clever," replied D'Artagnan; "but with four horses we shall be able to bring back our three friends should we find them alive."

"Which will be a great piece of luck," said Planchet; "but one must never despair of the mercy of God."

"Amen!" said D'Artagnan, bestriding his horse.

Our two travellers arrived at Chantilly without accident, and alighted at the *hôtel* of the Grand Saint-Martin, where they had put up before.

The host, on seeing the young man followed by a lackey and two led horses, advanced respectfully to the threshold of the door.

As he had ridden eleven leagues, D'Artagnan thought fit to stop, whether Porthos was at the inn or not. Then it might not be prudent to ask at once for the musketeer. D'Artagnan therefore alighted without putting any questions, entered a private room, and asked the host for a bottle of his best wine; a request which strengthened the high opinion which the innkeeper had formed of the traveller. D'Artagnan was therefore served with marvellous celerity.

The regiment of Guards was recruited from among the first gentlemen of the kingdom, and D'Artagnan, followed by a lackey, and travelling with four magnificent horses, could not fail, in spite of the simplicity of his uniform, to create a sensation.

The host insisted on waiting upon him himself; D'Artagnan therefore had two glasses brought, and began the following conversation:

"My dear host," he said, filling the glasses; "let us drink to the prosperity of your establishment."

"Your lordship does me honour," said the host, "and I thank you greatly for your good wishes. I believe this is not the first time that I have had the honour of seeing you, sir."

"Why! I have passed through Chantilly perhaps ten times, and have stopped here three or four times at least. I was here about twelve days ago; I was acting as guide to some friends of mine, some musketeers, when one of them had a dispute with a stranger, who picked a quarrel with him."

"Ah! yes, I remember perfectly. Is it not M. Porthos to whom your lordship refers?"

"That was the name of my fellow-traveller. Tell me, my dear host, did he meet with any accident?"

"But your lordship must have noticed that he did not continue his journey."

"Yes, he had promised to overtake us, and we did not see him again."

"He did us the honour to remain here."

"What! he did you the honour to remain here?"

"Yes, sir; in fact, we are very uneasy."

"And what about?"

"Certain expenses which he has incurred."

"Well, but he will pay them."

"Ah, sir, it is very comforting to hear you say so!"

"Well, can I see Porthos?"

"Certainly, sir. Go upstairs and knock at No. 1. Only let him know that it is you. M. Porthos might mistake you for some one belonging to the house, and run you through in his rage, or blow your brains out."

"Whatever have you done to him?"

"We have asked him for money."

"*Diable!* I understand; it is a demand which Porthos takes very badly when he is not in funds; but I know that he had plenty of money."

"This is what we thought, sir, and therefore, as we keep our accounts very regularly, we sent him his bill at the end of a week; but it seems that we hit on a bad moment, for at the first word he sent us to the devil. It is true that he had been gambling the evening before."

"How, he had gambled, and with whom?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* who can say? With some nobleman who stopped here, and who proposed a game of lansquenet."

"That's it; the unfortunate fellow must have lost all his money."

"Even to his horse, sir, for when the stranger was going away, we observed that his lackey was saddling the horse of M. Porthos. We mentioned this to him, but he told us to mind our own business. We informed M. Porthos of what was happening, and he sent word that we were dolts to doubt the word of a gentleman. Since that time, sir, no one has entered his room with the exception of his servant."

"Mousqueton is here, then?"

" Yes, sir ; five days after his departure he came back in very bad humour. It appears that the journey turned out disagreeably for him also. Unfortunately, he is better able to go about than his master, and upsets everything in the house, taking everything he requires without asking."

" Indeed," replied D'Artagnan, " I have always observed in Mousqueton great devotion and intelligence."

" Possibly, sir ; but if I were to find myself four times a year in contact with similar devotion and intelligence, I should be a ruined man."

" No ; for Porthos will pay you."

" Hum ! " said the host, in a tone of doubt.

" He is the favourite of a very great lady, who will not leave him in difficulties."

" If I dared say what I think about that——"

" What do you think ? "

" I may say that I know all about this great lady."

" And how do you come to know about her ? "

" Oh, sir ! if I thought that I could put faith in your discretion——"

" Speak ; on the word of a gentleman, you shall have no reason to repent of your confidence."

" Well, sir, you understand that uneasiness makes a man do many things."

" What have you done ? "

" Oh, nothing which a creditor has not a right to do. M. Porthos handed us a letter for this duchess, telling us to put it in the post. His servant had not arrived. As he could not leave his room, he was obliged to entrust us with this errand."

" What then ? "

" Instead of putting the letter in the post, which is never very safe, I gave it to one of my men who was going to Paris, and told him to hand it to the duchess herself. This was carrying out the intentions of M. Porthos, who had strongly commended the letter to our care, was it not ? Well, sir, do you know who this great lady is ? "

" No ; I have heard Porthos speak about her, that is all."

" She is the wife of a Procurator of the Châtelet, sir, named Madame Coquenard, who is at least fifty years of age, and who still has the pretension to be jealous. I thought it funny that a princess should live in the Rue aux Ours."

" How come you to know that ? "

" Because she flew into a great passion on receiving the letter,

saying that M. Porthos was inconstant, and that it must be for the sake of some woman that he had got run through again."

"Then he has been run through?"

"Ah! Goodness, what have I said!"

"You said that Porthos had received a sword-thrust."

"Yes; but he strictly forbade me to speak about it."

"Why?"

"Because, sir, he had boasted that he would perforate the stranger with whom you left him disputing, and, on the contrary, it was the stranger who, in spite of all his boasting, laid him low."

"And how did it all happen?"

"Oh, the thing did not take long, I can tell you! The gentleman made a feint and a lunge so rapidly, that when M. Porthos parried, he had already three inches of steel in the chest. He fell backwards. The stranger then put the point of his sword to his throat, and M. Porthos, seeing himself at the mercy of his adversary, owned himself vanquished. The stranger then asked him his name, and on learning that it was Porthos and not D'Artagnan, he offered him his arm, brought him back to the hotel, got on to his horse, and galloped away."

"So it was M. d'Artagnan that the stranger was after."

"So it would appear."

"And do you know what became of him?"

"No; I had never seen him before, and we have not seen him since."

"Very good, I know all I wanted to learn. You say that Porthos' room is No. 1, on the first floor?"

"Yes, sir, the best in the inn. I might have let it ten times."

"Bah! make your mind easy," said D'Artagnan, laughing. "Porthos will pay you with the money of the Duchesse Coquenard."

"Ah, sir, if she would only loosen the strings of her purse! But she said that she was tired of the exactions and the infidelities of M. Porthos, and that she would not send him a farthing."

"And did you give this reply to your guest?"

"We took good care not to do so; he would have discovered how we had delivered his message."

"So that he still expects his money?"

"Yes, he wrote again yesterday; but this time it was his servant who took the letter to the post."

"If his mistress abandons him he will find friends, I can

warrant; so, my dear host, do not be uneasy, and give him all the care which his condition requires."

"You have promised, sir, not to say a word about either the Procurator's wife or the wound."

"That is agreed; you have my word."

"Because he would kill me, you know."

"Don't be frightened; he is not such a demon as he appears."

So saying, D'Artagnan ascended the stair, leaving his host somewhat reassured concerning the things to which he seemed to attach most importance—his bill and his life.

D'Artagnan knocked at the door of No. 1, and was invited to enter.

Porthos was in bed, and was playing at lansquenet with Mousqueton to keep his hand in. A spit loaded with partridges was turning before the fire, and at each corner of the wide fireplace were two stewpots, which exhaled a most pleasant odour. The tops of a writing-desk and of a chest of drawers were covered with empty bottles.

At the sight of his friend Porthos uttered a cry of joy, and Mousqueton, rising respectfully, yielded his seat, and went to look after his stewpans.

"Ah, *pardieu!* it is you," said Porthos. "Welcome, and excuse me for not rising; but," he added, looking at D'Artagnan with a certain amount of uneasiness, "you know what happened to me?"

"No."

"The host did not tell you?"

"I asked for you, and came straight up."

Porthos appeared to breathe more freely.

"And what has happened to you, my dear Porthos?" asked D'Artagnan.

"It happened that when lunging at my adversary, to whom I had already administered three thrusts, and whom I wished to finish off with a fourth, I struck my foot against a stone and sprained my knee."

"Why did you not get yourself conveyed to Paris? You must have been terribly bored here."

"That was my intention; but, my dear fellow, there is something I must confess."

"What?"

"That as I was terribly bored, I asked a gentleman who was passing to come and have a game of dice; he accepted, and my seventy-five pistoles passed from my pocket to his, not to mention

my horse, which he carried off in addition. But you, my dear D'Artagnan ? "

" What would you, my dear Porthos ; you cannot have it all your own way," said D'Artagnan. " You know the proverb, ' Unlucky at play, lucky in love.' You are too fortunate in love for play not to take its revenge. But what does a reverse of fortune matter to you ? Have you not, happy scapegrace that you are—have you not your duchess who will come to your aid ? "

" Well, D'Artagnan, imagine my bad luck ! " replied Porthos, with the most careless air in the world. " I wrote to her to send me fifty louis, of which I stand absolutely in need, seeing the position in which I find myself ; and she must have gone into the country, for she has not replied."

" Really ? "

" No ; so I sent her a second letter yesterday still more pressing than the first. But you are here ; let us speak about yourself. I was beginning, I must acknowledge, to be uneasy on your account."

" But your landlord behaves well to you, it appears, my dear Porthos," said D'Artagnan, pointing to the stewpans and the empty bottles.

" So—so ! " replied Porthos. " Some three or four days ago the impertinent fellow brought me up my bill, and I turned them both out of the room—his bill and himself, so that I am here somewhat like a conqueror ; so, you see, fearing to have my position forced, I am armed to the teeth."

" Yet," said D'Artagnan, laughing, " it seems to me that every now and then you make sallies " ; and he pointed with his finger to the stewpans and the bottles.

" Not I, unfortunately," said Porthos ; " this wretched sprain keeps me in bed, but Mousqueton scours the country and brings in supplies. Mousqueton, my friend," continued Porthos, " you see that reinforcements have arrived, and that extra rations are required."

" Mousqueton," said D'Artagnan, " you must do me a service."

" Yes, sir ? "

" You must give your receipt to Planchet. I might be besieged in my turn, and I should not be sorry to enjoy advantages similar to those with which you indulge your master."

" Why ! sir," said Mousqueton, with a modest air, " nothing is more simple. You want a little skill, that is all. I was brought up in the country, and my father in his leisure moments was something of a poacher. It was he who taught me to make a

snare, and to lay a ground line ; and when I saw that our rascally host fed us on coarse meat unfit for delicate stomachs like ours, I bethought me of my old trade."

" But the wine," said D'Artagnan, " who provides that ? The host ? "

" Yes, and no."

" How yes and no ? "

" He provides it, but he is not aware that he has that honour."

" Explain yourself, Mousqueton ; your conversation is most instructive."

" I will explain, sir. It so happened that I met a Spaniard in my travels, who had seen many countries, and among them the New World. This Spaniard had a lackey in his service who had accompanied his master to Mexico ; we were compatriots, had the same tastes, and quickly became friends. We both loved sport, and he related to me how in the Pampas the natives hunt the tiger and buffalo with a simple slip-knot, which they throw round the neck of those terrible animals. First of all I could not believe that it was possible to attain such a degree of skill as to throw a noose where one wished, twenty or thirty paces away ; but on witnessing the proof, I was obliged to acknowledge the truth of the story. My friend placed a bottle at thirty paces, and at every cast caught it by the neck with his slip-knot. I practised this exercise, and as Nature has endowed me with some faculties, I can now throw a lasso as well as anyone in the world. Well ! do you understand ? Our host has a well-filled cellar, but the key never leaves him ; only this cellar has an air-hole. Through this air-hole I throw my lasso, and as I now know the good corner, I go for it. Now, will you taste our wine, and say what you think of it ? "

" Thank you, my friend, but I have just breakfasted."

" Well ! lay the table, Mousqueton, and while we breakfast D'Artagnan will tell us what he has been doing these last ten days."

" Willingly," said D'Artagnan.

While Porthos and Mousqueton were breakfasting with the appetites of convalescents, and that brotherly cordiality which draws together men in misfortune, D'Artagnan related how Aramis had been wounded, and obliged to stop at Crèvecœur, how he had left Athos in the clutches of four men at Amiens, and how he had been obliged to pass over the body of the Comte de Wardes in order to reach England.

There ceased the confidence of D'Artagnan ; he announced only

that he had returned from Great Britain with four magnificent horses, one for himself, and one for each of his friends, and he ended by informing Porthos that the charger destined for him was in the stable of the inn.

At this moment Planchet entered, warned his master that the horses were sufficiently rested, and that it would be possible to pass the night at Clermont.

As D'Artagnan was pretty well reassured with regard to Porthos, and was anxious for news of his other friends, he shook hands with the invalid, and said that he was going to continue his inquiries. Besides, as he expected to return by the same road within a week, if Porthos were still at the Grand Saint-Martin, he would pick him up as he passed.

Porthos replied that in all probability his sprain would not allow him to move before that date. Besides, he must await at Chantilly an answer from his duchess.

D'Artagnan wished him a prompt and favourable answer, and after recommending Porthos to Mousqueton, and paying his own bill, he set out with Planchet, already relieved of one of his horses.

CHAPTER XXV

THE THESIS OF ARAMIS

D'ARTAGNAN had said nothing to Porthos about his wound, or the Procurator's wife. Young as he was, our Béarnais was full of sagacity. He had consequently pretended to believe all that the vainglorious musketeer had told him, convinced that no friendship can resist a secret surprised, especially when this secret affects one's pride ; besides we feel a certain moral superiority over those whose lives are known to us. Now D'Artagnan, determined as he was to make his three companions the instruments of his fortunes, was not sorry to collect beforehand those invisible threads by which they might be acted upon.

On arriving at Crèvecœur, he caught sight of the inn where he had left Aramis, and, putting his horse to a trot, pulled up at the door.

This time it was not a landlord, but a landlady who received him. D'Artagnan was a judge of faces ; he saw at a glance by the open and beaming countenance of the mistress of the house that there was no need of dissembling with her, and that there was nothing to fear from so joyous a dame.

" My good woman," asked D'Artagnan, " can you tell me wnat has become of one of my friends whom we were obliged to leave here twelve days ago ? "

" A handsome young man of twenty-three or twenty-four years of age, gentle, amiable, well-made ? "

" And wounded in the shoulder ? "

" Exactly. Well, sir, he is still here."

" Ah, *pardieu !* my good woman," said D'Artagnan, getting off his horse, and throwing the bridle to Planchet ; " you restore me to life. Where is that dear Aramis, that I may embrace him ? "

" Pardon, sir, but I doubt if he can receive you at this moment."

" Why so ? Is he with a lady ? "

" Ah ! what say you, sir ? The poor fellow ! No ! he is not with a lady."

" With whom, then ? "

" With the Curé of Montdidier and the Superior of the Jesuits of Amiens."

" Goodness ! " exclaimed D'Artagnan, " is the poor fellow very bad ? "

" No, sir, on the contrary ; but after his illness, he was touched by grace, and he has determined to take holy orders."

" Just so," said D'Artagnan ; " I forgot that he was a musketeer only temporarily."

" You still insist upon seeing him, sir ? "

" More than ever."

" Well, sir, you have only to take the stairs on the right. You will find him in No. 5, on the second floor."

D'Artagnan followed this direction, but it was not so easy to arrive at the room of the future *abbé*. Bazin was posted in the passage, and barred the way with all the more intrepidity that he saw himself on the point of attaining the object of his ambition. For the dream of poor Bazin had always been to serve a Churchman, and he awaited with impatience the moment when Aramis would throw off his uniform and assume the cassock.

But D'Artagnan, as he had no idea of entering into a discussion with the valet of his friend, pushed him aside with one hand, and turned the handle of the door with the other. The door opened, and D'Artagnan penetrated into the chamber.

Aramis was dressed in black, with a cap on his head like that worn by priests ; he was seated at an oblong table covered with rolls of paper and huge folios ; at his right hand was the Superior of the Jesuits, and at his left the Curé of Montdidier.

All frivolous objects had disappeared from the room as if by

enchantment, and for fear their sight should bring back his master to ideas of the world, Bazin had laid hands on his sword, his pistols, his plumed hat, and all his embroidery and lace.

In their stead, D'Artagnan thought that he discerned in a dark corner, hanging from a nail in the wall, a scourge.

At the noise which D'Artagnan made in opening the door, Aramis raised his head and recognized his friend. But, to the great astonishment of the young man, his appearance did not seem to create much impression on the musketeer, to such an extent was his mind detached from worldly matters.

" Good day, dear D'Artagnan," said Aramis ; " I am very glad to see you."

" And so am I," said D'Artagnan, " although I am not yet very sure if I am speaking to Aramis."

" To himself, my friend, to himself. What could make you doubt it ? "

" I feared that I had mistaken the room, and entered that of a Churchman ; then I committed another error on finding you in the company of these gentlemen : I thought you were seriously ill."

The two men in black darted angry glances at D'Artagnan, who, taking no notice of them, continued :

" I disturb you, perhaps, my dear Aramis, for by what I see, I presume you are confessing to these gentlemen."

Aramis flushed slightly.

" You ! disturb me ? Oh ! on the contrary, I assure you. You arrive *à propos*, my dear D'Artagnan," said Aramis. " The question is this : the Superior thinks that my thesis should be, above all, didactic and dogmatic."

" Your thesis ! Are you writing a thesis ? "

" Of course," answered the Jesuit ; " in the examination which precedes ordination, a thesis is necessary."

" Ordination ! " exclaimed D'Artagnan, who could not believe what the landlady and Bazin had successively told him. And he eyed the three persons before him with astonishment.

" Now," continued Aramis, assuming a graceful attitude, " the Superior desires my thesis to be dogmatic, while I wish it to be ideal. Thus the Superior proposed the following subject, which has not yet been treated : *Utraque manus in benedicendo clericus inferioribus necessaria est*—which means that two hands are indispensable to the inferior order of the clergy when they give the benediction."

" An admirable subject ! " exclaimed the Jesuit.

" Admirable and dogmatic," repeated the Curé, who, not being much stronger than D'Artagnan in Latin, watched the Jesuit carefully, and repeated what he said.

After an hour's theological discussion D'Artagnan's brain was reeling ; he felt as if he were in a madhouse, and were going mad, himself.

At last the two men in black rose, bowed to Aramis and D'Artagnan, and went to the door. Aramis conducted them to the bottom of the stair, and then returned to D'Artagnan.

" So, Aramis, you enter the Church. What will your friends say ? What will M. de Tréville say ? They will treat you as a deserter. I warn you."

" I do not enter the Church ; I re-enter it. I deserted the Church for the world, for you know that I did violence to my feelings when I assumed the uniform of a musketeer."

" I ! I know nothing about it."

" You are not aware how I left the seminary ? "

" Not at all."

" Here is my story ; besides, the Scriptures say, ' Confess yourselves one to another,' and I confess myself to you, D'Artagnan."

" And I give you absolution beforehand."

" Do not joke over sacred matters, my friend."

" Speak ; I am listening."

" I had been at the seminary from the age of nine years. I was within three days of being twenty. I was going to be an *abbé*. One evening I went, as was my custom, to a house which I frequented with pleasure—one is weak and feeble. An officer who saw me with a jealous eye read the *Lives of the Saints* to the mistress of the house, entered suddenly without being announced. That very evening I had translated an episode of Judith, and had just read my verses to the lady, who paid me all kinds of compliments, and, leaning over my shoulder, re-read them with me. Her attitude, which was somewhat free, I admit, annoyed the officer ; he said nothing, but when I left, he left behind me, and overtaking me :

" ' Abbé,' he said, ' do you like a caning ? '

" ' I cannot say, sir,' I replied, ' no one ever having dared to give me one.'

" ' Well, listen, Abbé, if you return to that house I will dare.'

" I believe I was afraid ; I became very pale ; I felt my legs giving way under me ; I sought for an answer, but could find none.

" The officer waited for this answer, and seeing that it did not

come, burst out laughing, turned his back, and re-entered the house.

"I returned to the seminary.

"I am of good descent and somewhat hot-tempered, as you may have noticed; the insult was terrible, and although it was unknown to the rest of the world, it remained alive within my heart. I told my superiors that I did not feel sufficiently prepared for my ordination, and at my request the ceremony was delayed for a year.

"I went to the best fencing-master in Paris, and arranged with him to take a lesson every day for a twelve-month. Then on the anniversary of the day on which I had been insulted, I hung up my cassock, assumed the dress of a cavalier, and went to a ball given by a lady friend, where I knew that I should find my man.

"My officer was there. I approached him as he was singing a love-song, looking tenderly at a lady, and I interrupted him in the middle of the second couplet.

"'Sir,' I said, 'will it still displease you if I return to a certain house in the Rue Payenne, and will you still cane me if I disobey?'

"The officer looked at me with astonishment, and then said:

"'What do you want, sir? I do not know you.'

"I replied that I was the little *abbé* who read the *Lives of the Saints*, and translated Judith into verse.

"'Ah! ah! I remember,' said the officer, in a jeering way; 'what do you want?'

"'I should like you to find time to come and take a walk with me.'

"'To-morrow morning, if you like, with the greatest pleasure.'

"'Not to-morrow morning, but now, if you please.'

"'If you insist absolutely——"

"'Yes, I insist.'

"'Then come along. Ladies, do not stir. The time to kill this gentleman, and I will return and finish the couplet.'

"We went out. I took him to the Rue Payenne, to the spot where he had insulted me the year before. It was a beautiful moonlight night. We drew our swords, and at the first pass I killed him outright."

"*Diable!*" said D'Artagnan.

"Now, as the ladies did not see their singer return, and as he was found in the Rue Payenne run through, it was supposed that I had served him thus, and the affair created a great scandal.

I was, therefore, obliged for some time to renounce the cassock. Athos, whose acquaintance I made at the time, and Porthos, who had, in addition to my fencing lessons, taught me some pretty thrusts, persuaded me to ask for the uniform of a musketeer. The King had highly esteemed my father, who was killed at the siege of Arras, and granted my request. So you understand that to-day the moment has come for me to re-enter the Church."

"And why to-day rather than yesterday or to-morrow? What has happened to you to-day to give you such dismal ideas?"

"This wound, my dear D'Artagnan, is a warning from Heaven."

"That wound? Nonsense! it is almost healed; and I am sure it is not that which causes you most suffering to-day."

"And what then?" asked Aramis, flushing.

"You have one in your heart, Aramis, one much more dangerous, made by a woman."

The eyes of Aramis sparkled in spite of him.

"Ah!" he said, trying to conceal his emotion, "do not speak of those things. That I should think of such things, suffer the tortures of love, *vanitas vanitatum*! Do you think that I have allowed my head to be turned by some little chambermaid when in garrison!"

"I beg pardon, my dear Aramis. So you give up the world for ever; your resolution is taken?"

"For ever. You are my friend to-day, to-morrow you will be nothing for me but a shadow; as for the world, it is a sepulchre and nothing else."

"*Diable!* what you say there is very sad!"

"And yet," added Aramis, "while I still take an interest in the affairs of this world, I should have liked to speak to you of yourself and our friends."

"And I," said D'Artagnan, "would have liked to speak to you of yourself; but I see you so detached from everything—you turn up your nose at love, your friends are shadows, and the world a sepulchre."

"Alas! you see it yourself."

"Let us say no more about it," said D'Artagnan; "and let us burn this letter, which no doubt told of some new infidelity on the part of your chambermaid."

"What letter?" cried Aramis eagerly.

"A letter which reached your house in your absence, and which was handed to me for you."

"But whom is it from?"

"Ah! from some weeping maid—some *grisette* in despair; the chambermaid of Madame de Chevreuse perhaps, who being obliged to return to Tours with her mistress, must have taken some perfumed paper, and sealed her letter with a coronet."

"What say you?"

"Why, I must have lost it!" said D'Artagnan slyly, pretending to look for the letter. "Fortunately the world is a sepulchre, men and women are shadows, and love is a delusion."

"Ah, D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan!" cried Aramis, "you are killing me!"

"At last, here it is," said D'Artagnan, pulling the letter from his pocket.

Aramis leapt forward, seized the letter, read, or rather devoured it. His face beamed.

"It seems that the waiting-maid has a fine style," said D'Artagnan carelessly.

"Thanks," cried Aramis, almost beside himself. "She was obliged to return to Tours; she is not unfaithful; she still loves me. Come, my friend, and let me embrace you; this happiness is too much for me!"

And the two friends began to dance round, trampling on the leaves of the thesis which had fallen on the floor. At this moment Bazin entered with spinach and an omelette.

"Make off, scamp!" cried Aramis, flinging his cap in his face; "return whence you came, take away those horrid vegetables and that frightful *entremets*! Order a larded hare, a fat capon, a leg of mutton, and four bottles of old Burgundy."

Bazin, who looked at his master, but who understood nothing of this change, allowed the omelette to slip into the spinach, and the spinach on to the floor.

"Now is the time to consecrate yourself to the Church," said D'Artagnan. "*Non inutile desiderium in oblatione.*"

"To the devil with your Latin, dear D'Artagnan; let us drink while the wine is cool—drink heartily, and tell me something of what is happening in the world."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE WIFE OF ATHOS

"WE have still to get news of Athos," said D'Artagnan, when he had informed Aramis of all that had passed in the capital since their departure, and after an excellent dinner had made the one forget his thesis, and the other his fatigue.

"Do you think anything untoward has happened to him?" asked Aramis. "Athos is so cool, so brave, and handles his sword so skilfully."

"No one has a higher opinion of the courage and skill of Athos than I have, but I prefer the shock of lances on my sword to that of sticks; I fear, therefore, that Athos has been badly beaten by the valets, who are men who strike hard and long. For this reason I should like to set off as soon as possible."

"I will try to accompany you," said Aramis, "although I hardly feel fit to mount a horse. Yesterday I tried a little flagellation, but the pain prevented me from continuing that pious exercise."

"Indeed, my dear fellow, no one ever tried to cure a musket-shot with a cat-o'-nine-tails; but you were ill, and illness makes the head weak."

"And when do you start?"

"To-morrow at daybreak; rest as best you can to-night, and if you can we will start together."

"Till to-morrow, then," said Aramis; "for, made of iron though you are, you must require rest."

The next day, when D'Artagnan entered the room of Aramis, he found him at the window.

"What are you looking at?" asked D'Artagnan.

"*Ma foi!* I am admiring those three magnificent steeds; it must be a princely pleasure to travel on such horses."

"Well, my dear Aramis, you will have that pleasure, for one of those chargers is yours."

"Bah! which one?"

"Whichever you like."

"You are joking, D'Artagnan."

"I have stopped joking since you have dropped Latin."

"Was it the King, then, who made you that present?"

"It was certainly not the Cardinal; but don't mind where they come from."

"I will choose the one led by the red-haired valet."

"Very good!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Aramis, "this will cure me of my pain; I would mount such a horse with thirty bullets in my body. On my soul, these are fine stirrups! Ho, Bazin! come here immediately."

Bazin made his appearance, looking very mournful.

"Furbish up my sword, set my hat right, brush my cloak, and load my pistols," said Aramis.

"This last recommendation is useless," said D'Artagnan; "there are loaded pistols in the holsters."

"Hold my stirrup, Bazin," said Aramis, who jumped into the saddle with his usual agility and lightness; but after the noble animal had pranced about a little his rider found his pain so unbearable that he grew pale, and nearly lost his seat.

D'Artagnan seized him by the arm, helped him to dismount, and took him back to his room.

"My dear Aramis," said he, "you must take care of yourself, and I will go on alone in quest of Athos."

"You are made of steel," said Aramis.

"No; I have good luck, that is all; but how are you going to live in my absence?"

Aramis smiled.

"I will write verse," he said.

"Yes, verse perfumed with the *billet* of Madame de Chevreuse's maid. Teach Bazin prosody; that will console him. As for the horse, ride it a little every day; that will accustom you to take exercise."

"You may be sure of that," said Aramis. "On your return you will find me ready to follow you."

They said good-bye, and ten minutes afterward D'Artagnan having recommended his friend to Bazin and the landlady, was trotting in the direction of Amiens.

How would he find Athos, and would he find him at all? The position in which he had left him was critical; he had perhaps succumbed. This idea darkened his brow, drew from him some sighs and threats of revenge. Of all his friends Athos was the oldest, and their tastes and sympathies resembled each other the least, yet D'Artagnan had a marked preference for this gentleman.

The noble and distinguished appearance of Athos, the flashes of greatness which lighted up from time to time the gloom in which he voluntarily enshrouded himself, that unchangeable evenness of temper, which made him the most accommodating

companion in the world, that forced and biting gaiety, that bravery, which would have been called rash had it not been the result of unusual *sang-froid* : all these qualities excited more than the esteem, more than the friendship of D'Artagnan; they excited his admiration.

And yet this distinguished nature tended to turn toward a grosser existence. In hours of privation all the luminous and brilliant portion of his character would disappear in a gloomy night. Then the demigod disappeared, and there remained hardly a man.

Athos would sit for hours looking, with bent head and glassy eye, at his bottle, at his glass, and at Grimaud ; and if the four friends were assembled at the moment, would furnish nothing to the general conversation, but remain plunged in the deepest gloom.

D'Artagnan, with whose investigating and penetrating mind we are acquainted, had been unable, no matter how anxious to satisfy his curiosity, to assign any cause for this moroseness. Athos never received any letters, and never undertook anything unknown to his companions.

That shade of mystery, spread over his whole person, rendered still more interesting a man who, even when swathed in drink, had never made any revelation, in spite of the skill with which questions were put to him.

" Well, poor Athos is perhaps dead, and dead by my fault ; for it was I who dragged him into this affair, of the origin of which he was ignorant, and from the result of which he could derive no benefit."

" Without reckoning, sir," said Planchet, " that in all probability we owe him our lives. You remember how he shouted, ' Fly, D'Artagnan ! I am caught ' ; and after having discharged his pistols, what a terrible clatter he made with his sword."

These words redoubled the ardour of D'Artagnan, who urged on his horse.

Toward eleven in the morning Amiens was in sight, and half an hour afterward they arrived at the door of the accursed inn.

D'Artagnan had often meditated plans of revenge against the perfidious host. He entered the hostelry, his hat over his eyes, his left hand on the pommel of his sword, and swishing his riding-whip with his right hand.

" Do you recognize me ? " he said to the host, who advanced to meet him.

"I have not that honour, Monseigneur," he replied, his eyes still dazzled by D'Artagnan's brilliant escort.

"Ah! you do not know me?"

"No, Monseigneur."

"Well! two words will restore your memory. What have you done with the gentleman against whom you had the audacity, a fortnight ago, to bring a charge of offering false coin?"

The host grew pale, for D'Artagnan had assumed a threatening attitude, and Planchet imitated his master.

"Ah! Monseigneur, do not speak of it," exclaimed the host in a lachrymose voice. "Ah! how dearly have I paid for that fault! Ah! how unfortunate I am!"

"I ask you what has become of that gentleman!"

"Condescend to listen to me, Monseigneur, and be merciful. Sit down, in mercy!"

D'Artagnan, dumb with rage and anxiety, sat down with the severity of a judge. Planchet took his stand beside him.

"This is what happened, Monseigneur," said the host, trembling all over, "for I recognize you now; it was you who left when I had that unfortunate misunderstanding with the gentleman of whom you speak."

"Yes, it was I; therefore, you see that you have no mercy to expect, unless you tell the whole truth."

"If you will listen to me, you shall know all. I had been warned by the authorities that a celebrated false-coiner would arrive at my inn with several companions, all disguised as guards, or musketeers. Your horses, your lackeys, your faces were all described. Monseigneur, I therefore, in accordance with the instructions of the authorities, who sent me a reinforcement of six men, took measures for seizing upon these pretended coiners."

"Again!" said D'Artagnan, whose ears tingled at the words "coiners."

"Pardon me, Monseigneur, for saying such things, but they form my excuse. The authorities frightened me, and you know that an innkeeper must keep on good terms with the authorities."

"But, once for all, what has become of the gentleman? Is he dead, or is he alive?"

"Patience, Monseigneur, we are coming to that. You know what happened, and your hurried departure," said the host, with a grain of irony which did not escape D'Artagnan, "appeared to justify the event. Your friend defended himself desperately,

His valet, who by an unforeseen hitch had got into a quarrel with some of the police, disguised as hostlers——"

"Ah! wretch, you were all in the plot," cried D'Artagnan, "and I don't know what keeps me from exterminating the lot of you!"

"Alas, no, Monseigneur, we were not all in the plot, as you will see. Your friend, after having put two men *hors de combat* with his pistols, retreated, defending himself with his sword, maiming another of my men, and stunning me with the flat of the blade."

"But, scoundrel, will you finish, and tell me what has become of Athos?"

"In his retreat, Monseigneur, he found the stairs of the cellar behind him, and as the door was open, he drew out the key, and barricaded himself inside. As they were sure of finding him there, they let him alone. He had done plenty of execution: he had killed one man outright, and had dangerously wounded two more. The dead and the wounded were carried off, and I heard no more of them. As for myself, when I came to my senses I went to see the Governor, and told him what had occurred, and asked him what I should do with my prisoner. But the Governor seemed quite amazed; he told me that he knew nothing of what I was speaking about, that the orders given to me did not emanate from him, and that if I had the misfortune to say that he was in any way concerned in the matter, I should be hung. It seems, sir, that I made a mistake, and that I arrested one person instead of another."

"But Athos?" cried D'Artagnan, whose impatience redoubled, "what has become of him?"

"As I was in a hurry to repair the wrong I had done to the prisoner," said the innkeeper, "I went to the cellar to restore him to liberty. Ah! sir, he was no longer a man, but a demon. With regard to the offer of liberty, he said that it was a trap, and that before coming out he should impose his conditions. I told him humbly—for I was aware of the awkward position in which I had placed myself by laying hands on a musketeer of the King—that I was ready to submit to his conditions.

"'In the first place,' said he, 'I must have my valet back, armed.'

"We hastened to obey this order; for you understand, sir, that we were disposed to do anything your friend desired. M. Grimaud was therefore let down into the cellar, wounded as he was; then his master, having received him, re-barricaded the door, and ordered us to remain in our shop."

"But where is he? where is Athos?" cried D'Artagnan.

"In the cellar, sir."

"How, wretch, you have kept him in the cellar ever since?"

"Goodness gracious! no, sir. Keep him in the cellar? You don't know what he does in the cellar! Ah! if you could only get him to come out, sir, I should be grateful to you all my life. I should worship you as my patron saint."

"Then he is there? I shall find him there?"

"Without doubt, sir; he has persisted in remaining there. Every day we pass him bread by the air-hole, at the end of a pitchfork, and meat when he requires it; but, alas! it is not of bread and meat that he makes the greatest consumption. Once I tried to go down with two of my men, but he flew into a terrible passion. I heard him cocking his pistols and his musket. We asked them what their intentions were, and the master said that he and his lackey had forty rounds, and that they would fire away the last, sooner than permit anyone to enter the cellar. Then, sir, I went and complained to the Governor, who replied that I had only what I deserved, and that that would teach me to insult honourable noblemen who alighted at my inn."

"So that since that time——?" said D'Artagnan, who couldn't help laughing at the piteous face of his host.

"So that since that time, sir, we lead the most melancholy existence possible, for, sir, you must know that all our provisions are in the cellar; our wine in bottle, our wine in wood, our beer, oil, spices, bacon, sausages, and as we cannot go down there, we are obliged to refuse food and drink to the travellers who come to us, and consequently every day our hostelry goes from bad to worse. Another week with your friend in the cellar and we shall be ruined."

"And it will be only just, you rogue! Could you not tell by our appearance that we were persons of quality?"

"Yes, sir, yes; you are right. But listen, there he is in a rage!"

"No doubt some one has disturbed him," said D'Artagnan.

"But we have got to disturb him," cried the host, "for two English gentlemen have just arrived. They like good wine, sir, and have asked for the best. My wife must have begged M. Athos to allow her to satisfy these gentlemen, and he must have refused, as usual. Good heavens! the tumult is redoubling!"

D'Artagnan heard a great noise in the cellar; he rose, and, preceded by the host, who was wringing his hands, and followed

by Planchet, who kept his musket cocked, approached the scene of action.

The two gentlemen were exasperated; they had had a long ride, and were dying of hunger and thirst.

"But this is a piece of tyranny," they cried in very good French, though with a slight accent, "that this madman will not allow these honest folk the use of their wine. We are going to break open the door, and to kill him if need be."

"Gently, sirs," said D'Artagnan, drawing his pistols from his belt; "you shall kill no one, if you please."

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried the hollow voice of Athos, "is that D'Artagnan whom I hear?"

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, raising his voice, "it is I, my friend."

"Ah, good! Then," said Athos, "we will give these door-breakers something to do."

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, whose coolness never abandoned him, "think over matters. Patience, Athos! You are getting into an awkward position, and you will be riddled. My valet and myself will fire three shots, as many will be fired from the cellar, after which we shall have our swords, which my friend and I can handle pretty well, I assure you. Allow me to settle matters for both sides. You shall have something to drink presently, I give you my word."

The Englishmen sheathed their swords. They were told the story of the imprisonment of Athos, and as they were gentlemen, they found that the host was in the wrong.

"Now," said D'Artagnan, "go upstairs, and in ten minutes they will bring you all you want."

The Englishmen bowed and retired.

"Now that I am alone, my dear Athos, open the door, I beg of you."

"In a moment," said Athos.

Then was heard a great noise of faggots knocking against each other, of beams groaning—these were the fortifications of Athos, which were being demolished by the besieged.

A moment afterward the door opened, and the pale face of Athos appeared.

D'Artagnan flung himself on his neck, and embraced him tenderly. He was about to drag him out of his damp abode, when he noticed that Athos was reeling.

"You are wounded," he said.

"I! Not in the least. I am dead drunk, that is all; and

never did man set about it more thoroughly. I must have got through at least a hundred and fifty bottles, for my share."

"The Lord have mercy on me!" cried the landlord. "If the valet has drunk half as much as the master, I am ruined."

"Grimaud is a lackey too well trained to fare like me; he drank from the cask only. Listen! I think he has forgotten to put back the plug. Do you hear? It is running."

D'Artagnan burst into a roar of laughter, which changed the cold sweat of the host into a fever.

In the meantime, Grimaud appeared in his turn behind his master, looking as drunk as one of the satyrs in a picture of Rubens. He was dripping before and behind with what the host recognized as his best olive oil.

The procession crossed the public room, and took possession of the best chamber in the inn.

During this time the landlord and his wife rushed into the cellar, where a fearful spectacle awaited them.

Beyond the fortifications, in which Athos had made a breach in order to get out, were to be seen swimming here and there, in pools of oil and wine, the bones of all the hams which had been eaten, while a heap of broken bottles filled the left angle of the cellar, and a barrel, the cock of which had been left open, was losing the last drops of its blood. The image of devastation and death, as an ancient poet said, reigned over the field of battle.

Out of fifty sausages hanging from the rafters, hardly ten remained.

The howls of the landlords pierced the vault of the cellar. D'Artagnan himself was moved, but Athos did not even turn his head.

Then rage succeeded grief. The landlord armed himself with a spit, and, in his despair, rushed into the room where the two friends had retired.

"Some wine!" said Athos, on seeing his host.

"Wine!" exclaimed the landlord, amazed; "why, you have drunk over a hundred pistoles' worth! I am a ruined man!"

"Bah!" said Athos; "we never drank our fill."

"You shall pay for all this!" cried the exasperated host.

"You double-dyed villain!" said Athos, rising, but falling back again. D'Artagnan came to the rescue and flourished his whip.

The landlord recoiled a pace, and burst into tears.

"That will teach you to treat the guests whom God sends you with so little courtesy."

"God! say the Devil!"

"My dear friend," said D'Artagnan, "if you go on making such a din, the four of us will lock ourselves up in your cellar again."

"Well, yes, gentlemen, I own that I was wrong; but there is forgiveness for every sin. You are nobles, and I am only a poor innkeeper. You will have pity on me."

"Ah, if you talk like that," said Athos, "my heart will melt, and my tears will flow as the wine flowed from your casks. We are not such devils as we look. Come, let us talk matters over."

The landlord approached nervously.

"Come, I say, and do not be afraid," continued Athos. "When I was about to pay you I had placed my purse on the table."

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"It contained sixty pistoles. What has become of it?"

"It was deposited at the Magistrate's Office, Monseigneur; they said the coins were false."

"Well, let me have my purse back, and keep the sixty pistoles."

"But Monseigneur knows that at the Magistrate's Office they do not let go what they have a hold of. If the coins had been false, there would be some hope; but it was good money."

"You must settle that. It is no concern of mine, especially as I have not a livre left."

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "where is M. Athos' horse?"

"In the stable."

"How much is it worth?"

"Fifty pistoles, at the outside."

"It is worth eighty. Take it, and say no more."

"What? You sell my horse," said Athos; "my steed Bajazet!"

"I have brought you another," said D'Artagnan.

"Another?"

"A magnificent one," said the host.

"Then, if there is a handsomer and younger one, take the old one, and bring some wine."

"Which?" asked the host, quite comforted.

"That at the end, near the laths. There still remain twenty-five bottles; the others were broken by my fall. Bring up six."

"And don't forget," said D'Artagnan, "to take up four to the Englishmen."

" Now," said Athos, " while waiting for the wine, tell me what has become of the others."

D'Artagnan told Athos how he had found Porthos in bed with a sprain, and Aramis at a table between two theologians.

The host brought in the wine, and a ham which had not been in the cellar.

" Good," said Athos, filling his glass and that of D'Artagnan. " So much for Porthos and Aramis. Now for yourself, my friend ; you have a melancholy look."

" Alas," said D'Artagnan, " I am the most unhappy of you all ! "

" You unhappy, D'Artagnan ! Tell me about that."

D'Artagnan related his adventure with Madame Bonacieux.

Athos listened to him patiently, and, when he had done, exclaimed :

" Trifles ! trifles ! "

This was a favourite expression of Athos.

" You always say ' Trifles,' my dear Athos ; that ill becomes you, who have never loved."

" Your misfortune makes me laugh," said Athos, shrugging his shoulders. " I should like to know what you would say, were I to relate a love-story to you."

" Tell it, Athos ; tell it."

Athos collected himself.

" Let it be as you desire," he said. " One of my friends—not myself, observe—one of the Counts of my province, that is to say of Berry, as noble as a Dandolo or a Montmorency, fell in love, at twenty-five years of age, with a lovely young girl of sixteen. Through the simplicity natural to her age there pierced an ardent mind—not that of a woman, but that of a poet. She did not please ; she intoxicated. She lived in a small town with her brother, who was a priest. Both had come there, no one knew whence ; and seeing that she was so beautiful, and that he was so pious, no one inquired. Besides, they were said to be of good birth. My friend, who was the lord of the country, might have seduced her or have taken her by force ; he was the master. Unfortunately, he was an honourable man, and he married her —the fool, the simpleton, the idiot ! "

" But why, since he loved her ? " asked D'Artagnan.

" Wait a little," said Athos. " He took her to his château and made her the first lady in his province, and it is only right to say that she upheld her rank perfectly."

" Well ? " asked D'Artagnan.

"Well, one day, when she was out hunting with her husband, she fell from her horse and fainted," continued Athos in a low voice, speaking very rapidly. "The Count darted to her assistance; and, as she was hardly able to breathe, he cut open her dress and uncovered her shoulder. Guess what there was on the shoulder, D'Artagnan?" said Athos, with a burst of laughter.

"How can I know?" said D'Artagnan.

"A *fleur-de-lis*," said Athos. "She was branded."

And Athos tossed off the glass which he held in his hand.

"How horrible!" exclaimed D'Artagnan. "What do you tell me?"

"The truth. The angel was a demon. The poor young girl was a thief."

"And what did the Count do?"

"The Count was a great noble. He had full power to administer justice on his estates. He stripped the Countess of her clothing; he tied her hands behind her back, and hanged her to a tree."

"Heavens! Athos. A murder!"

"Yes, a murder; nothing more," said Athos, pale as death. "But they are leaving me without wine, it seems to me."

He seized the last bottle by the neck and emptied it at a draught. Then he allowed his head to fall between his two hands. D'Artagnan was overcome with horror.

"That cured me of handsome, poetical, and loving women," said Athos, rising and forgetting to carry on the fiction of the Count.

"Then she is dead?" stammered D'Artagnan.

"*Parbleu!*" said Athos. "But hold out your glass."

"And her brother?" asked D'Artagnan timidly.

"Her brother?"

"Yes; the priest?"

"Ah, I asked after him, in order to hang him in his turn; but he had made his escape."

"Do they know who the wretch really was?"

"He was, no doubt, the first lover and the accomplice of the fair one. I hope that he has been broken on the wheel by this time."

"My God!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, stunned by this horrible adventure.

He could no longer carry on this conversation, which would have driven him mad. He allowed his head to fall between his hands, and pretended to fall asleep.

"These young fellows no longer know how to drink," said Athos, looking at him with pity; "and yet he is one of the best!"

CHAPTER XXVII

THE RETURN

D'ARTAGNAN was overwhelmed by this terrible confidence on the part of Athos; yet a great many things seemed to him to be still obscure in this half-revelation. First of all, it had been made by a man drunk to one who was half drunk: but in spite of the fumes of two or three bottles of Burgundy, D'Artagnan, on awaking the next morning, had preserved a vivid recollection of every word which had fallen from the lips of Athos.

His doubt gave him the most ardent desire to arrive at a certainty, and he went to see his friend, fully determined to continue the conversation of the previous evening. But he found Athos, who had recovered his senses, the most keen-witted and impenetrable of men.

Indeed, the musketeer, after shaking hands with him, anticipated his desire.

"I was very drunk last night, my dear D'Artagnan," he said; "I feel my tongue thick this morning; I am sure I said a thousand extravagant things."

And in speaking thus, he looked so fixedly at his friend that the latter felt embarrassed.

"Not at all," said D'Artagnan; "if I remember right, you said nothing extraordinary."

"Ah! you astonish me; I thought I had told you a very lamentable story."

And he looked at the young man as if he would read the bottom of his heart.

D'Artagnan remained silent, and Athos, changing the conversation, said:

"By the way, I much thank you for the horse you brought me."

"Is he to your taste?"

"Yes, but he was not a horse for hard riding."

"You are mistaken; I rode him ten leagues in less than an hour and a half, and he appeared no more distressed than if he had merely gone round the Place Saint-Sulpice."

" Ah ! then you will make me regret parting with him."

" How's that ? "

" Here are the facts : this morning I awoke at six o'clock ; you were sleeping soundly, and I did not know what to do ; I was still quite stupid from our debauch of yesterday. I went down into the common room, and met one of our Englishmen, who was haggling with a dealer over a horse, his own having died of congestion yesterday. I approached ; and as he was offering a hundred pistoles for a dark chestnut, I said to him : ' Monsieur, I too have a horse to sell.'

" ' And a very fine one,' he said ; ' I saw it yesterday.'

" ' Do you consider that he is worth a hundred pistoles ? '

" ' Yes, and will you give him to me for that price ? "

" ' No, but I will play for him.'

" ' At what game ? '

" ' At dice.'

" Which was no sooner said than done, and I lost my horse. But," added Athos, " I won back the caparison."

D'Artagnan looked perturbed.

" Are you annoyed ? " said Athos.

" Yes, I acknowledge that I am. That horse was to have served to make us known in the day of battle : it was a pledge, a souvenir. Athos, you have done wrong."

" Well, my dear friend ; put yourself in my place ; I was bored to death, and then, on my honour, I do not like English horses."

D'Artagnan continued to look vexed.

" I am sorry," continued Athos, " that you appear to attach so much importance to those animals, for I have not got to the end of my story."

" What else have you done ? "

" After losing my horse, nine against ten, the idea occurred to me to stake yours."

" Yes, but I hope that you remained at the idea."

" No, I put it into execution at once. I played and lost."

" My horse ? "

" Your horse : seven against eight—for want of one point—you know the proverb."

" But this is fearful ! "

" Wait a minute ! this isn't the end. I should make an excellent gambler if I were not obstinate. I got obstinate, then——"

" But what could you stake ? you had nothing left."

"Yes, yes, my friend; there remained the diamond ring which glitters on your finger, and which I noticed yesterday."

"This diamond?" said D'Artagnan, placing his hand quickly on his ring.

"And, as I am a connoisseur, I valued it at a thousand pistoles."

"I hope," said D'Artagnan seriously, half dead with fright, "that you made no mention of my diamond?"

"On the contrary, my dear fellow. You understand, this diamond became our only resource; with it I might win back horses and harness, and, what is more, money for the road."

"Athos, you make me tremble," cried D'Artagnan.

"I therefore spoke of your diamond to my adversary, who had also noticed it. Why the devil do you wear a star on your finger if you wish no one to pay attention to it?"

"Finish, my dear friend, finish; for you are killing me with your coolness."

"So we divided the diamond into ten parts, of a hundred pistoles each."

"Ah, you are joking, and want to see how I'll take it!" said D'Artagnan, who was fast losing his temper.

"No, I am not joking; *mordieu!* I should have liked to have seen you in my position. For a fortnight I had not seen a human face, and was making a beast of myself in company with bottles."

"That was no reason for staking my diamond," replied D'Artagnan, clenching his fist with a nervous movement.

"Listen to the end: ten games for a hundred pistoles each, in ten throws without revenge; in thirteen throws I lost all. The number thirteen has always been fatal to me; it was on the 13th of July that——"

"*Ventrebleu!*" cried D'Artagnan, rising from the table, the story of the day making him forget that of the preceding evening.

"Patience," said Athos, "I had a plan. The Englishman was an original; I had seen him in the morning talking to Grimaud, and Grimaud had informed me that he had offered to take him into his service. I played with him for Grimaud—the silent Grimaud, divided into ten portions."

"Ah, I never heard the like!" said D'Artagnan, laughing in spite of himself.

"Grimaud himself, do you hear that? and with the ten parts of Grimaud, who is not worth a ducat, I won back the diamond. Now is not perseverance a virtue?"

"*Ma foi*, this is very funny!" said D'Artagnan, holding his sides with laughter.

"You can understand that finding myself in luck I staked your diamond again."

"*Diable!*" exclaimed D'Artagnan, once more gloomy.

"I won back your harness, then your horse, then my harness and my horse, then I lost them again. To be short, I again won back your trappings and mine. There is where we are. It was a superb throw, and I stopped there."

D'Artagnan breathed as if the whole hostelry had been removed from his chest.

"So I've still got the diamond?" he said timidly.

"Intact, my dear friend, as also the trappings of your Bucephalus and of mine."

"But what shall we do with the trappings without horses?"

"I have an idea with regard to them."

"Athos, you make me shudder."

"Listen! you have not played for a long time; you ought to be in luck."

"Well, what of that?"

"Well, the Englishman and his companion are still there. I observed that he greatly regretted the trappings. You appear to attach importance to your horse; I should stake your trappings against your horse."

"And if I lose?"

"You will win."

"But if I lose?"

"Well, you will give the trappings."

"Let us have one throw, then," said D'Artagnan.

Athos went in search of the Englishman, and found him in the stable, looking at the trappings with a covetous eye. It was a good opportunity. He made his conditions. The two sets of trappings against one horse or a hundred pistoles.

The Englishman accepted.

D'Artagnan threw the dice and got only three; his pallor frightened Athos, who simply said:

"A bad throw, comrade. You will win horses and harness, sir."

The Englishman, with an air of triumph, threw the dice on the table without looking, he was so sure of victory. D'Artagnan had turned his head aside to hide his bad humour.

"Well, well!" said Athos quietly, "that is a most extraordinary throw—two aces! I have seen that only four times before."

The Englishman looked, and was struck with astonishment; D'Artagnan looked, and was seized with pleasure.

"Yes," continued Athos; "only four times. Once at the house of M. de Créquy; once at my château of—— when I had a château; once at the house of M. de Tréville; and the fourth time in a wineshop, when I lost a hundred louis and a supper."

"Then you take back your horse, sir?" said the Englishman.

"Certainly," said D'Artagnan.

"Then you will not give me my revenge?"

"Our conditions were, that there was to be no revenge."

"That is true; the horse shall be handed over to your valet, sir."

"One moment," said Athos. "With your permission, sir, I will say a word to my friend."

"Say on."

Athos drew D'Artagnan aside.

"You are going to take back the horse, are you not?"

"Without the least doubt."

"You are wrong; I would take a hundred pistoles."

"Well, I prefer the horse."

"I repeat that you are wrong; what shall we do with a horse between us? I cannot ride behind you. I would not hesitate for a moment; we require money in order to return to Paris."

"I wish to keep the horse, Athos."

"But a horse falls lame, a horse may eat in the rack where a horse with glanders has eaten, and there is a horse, or rather a hundred pistoles, lost; the master must feed the horse, whereas a hundred pistoles would feed the master."

"But how shall we return?"

"On the horses of our lackeys, *parbleu!* people will see by our appearance that we are persons of quality."

"A nice figure we shall cut on our nags, while Aramis and Porthos are prancing about on their horses!"

"Aramis! Porthos!" exclaimed Athos, laughing.

"What is the matter?" asked D'Artagnan, who did not understand the hilarity of his companion.

"Good, good! let us go on," said Athos.

"Therefore, your advice——"

"Is to take the hundred pistoles; with them we shall be able to feast until the end of the month; we have undergone a good deal of fatigue, and we need a rest."

"Rest! no, Athos; as soon as I return to Paris I shall look for that poor woman."

" Well, do you think that your horse will be of more use to you in that than some golden louis ? Accept the hundred pistoles."

D'Artagnan required only a reason to yield, and this one appeared excellent. Then, if he resisted any longer he feared that Athos would think him selfish. He therefore chose the hundred pistoles, which were paid on the spot.

They made up their minds to start at once. The bill was settled by adding six pistoles to the horse which Athos had already given to the landlord. Athos and D'Artagnan mounted the nags of Planchet and Grimaud, while the two valets took the road on foot, carrying the saddles on their heads.

Badly mounted though they were, the two friends soon left their valets behind, and arrived at Crèvecœur. From a distance they caught sight of Aramis looking in a melancholy way out of the window, like *sister Anne*, at the dust on the horizon.

" Halloa, Aramis ! what the devil are you doing there ? " cried the two friends.

" Ah ! it is you, D'Artagnan, and you, Athos ; I was dreaming with what rapidity the goods of this world vanish, and my English horse, which has just disappeared in a whirlwind of dust, seemed to me a living image of the fragility of the things of this world. Life may be summed up in three words, *Erat, est, fuit.*"

" Which means ? " said D'Artagnan, who began to suspect the truth.

" Which means that I have made a bad bargain—sixty louis for a horse which, it would appear, can trot five leagues an hour ! "

D'Artagnan and Athos burst out laughing.

" My dear D'Artagnan, do not be too angry. Necessity has no law. I am the first punished, since that infamous horse-dealer robbed me of at least fifty louis. Ah ! you are careful fellows, riding the nags of your lackeys, and making them lead your chargers by easy stages."

At the same moment a wagon stopped at the door, from which Grimaud and Planchet emerged with their saddles on their heads.

" What is all this ? " exclaimed Aramis. " Nothing but the saddles ! "

" You understand now," said Athos.

" My friends, it is just like me. I kept the accoutrements by instinct."

" And what have you done with your priests ? " asked D'Artagnan.

" I invited them to dine the next day," said Aramis ; " there

is some exquisite wine here ; I made them both as tipsy as I could ; then the Curé forbade me to quit my uniform, and the Jesuit begged me to get him received as a musketeer."

" Without a thesis ! " exclaimed D'Artagnan, " we must have no thesis ! "

" Since then," continued Aramis, " I have lived pleasantly. I have begun a poem in lines of one syllable, which is difficult enough ; but the merit of a thing lies in its difficulty. The subject is dainty. I will read the first canto to you : it runs to four hundred lines and lasts one minute."

" *Ma foi*, my dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan, who disliked verse almost as much as Latin, " add to the merit of difficulty that of brevity, and your poem will be sure of a double success."

" Besides," added Aramis, " its subject is most respectable. You shall see. So we are going back to Paris ? Bravo ! I am ready ; we are going to see once more that good Porthos ; so much the better. You cannot think how I miss that big simpleton ! It is not Porthos who would have sold his horse, even for a kingdom. I long to see him on his charger and in his saddle. He will have the appearance of the Great Mogul."

They halted for an hour to let their horses breathe, then Aramis paid his bill, placed Bazin in the wagon with his comrades, and set out in quest of Porthos.

They found him up—not so pale as when D'Artagnan had seen him on his first visit—seated at a table where, although he was alone, dinner was set for four persons ; this dinner was composed of meats skilfully cooked, of choice wines, and superb fruit.

" *Pardieu !* " he said, rising, " you arrive just in time, gentlemen ; I was at my soup, and you will dine with me."

" But this dinner was not for you alone, my dear Porthos ? " said Aramis.

" No ; I expected some gentlemen of the neighbourhood, who have just sent word that they could not come. You will replace them, and I shall not lose by the change. Mousqueton ! chairs, and twice as many bottles."

" Do you know what we are eating now ? " asked Athos, after ten minutes.

" *Pardieu !* " replied D'Artagnan, " I am eating veal larded with marrow."

" And I fillets of lamb," said Porthos.

" And I the white of a chicken," said Aramis.

" You are all mistaken, gentlemen," replied Athos seriously ; " you are eating horse."

"Nonsense!" said D'Artagnan.

"Horseflesh!" exclaimed Aramis, making a grimace.

Porthos alone did not reply.

"Yes, horse; is it not so, Porthos? and perhaps the caparisons with it!"

"No, gentlemen; I have kept the trappings," said Porthos.

"*Ma foi!* one is no better than the other," said Aramis. "One might think we had passed the word round."

"What would you have me do?" cried Porthos; "that horse put my visitors to shame, and I did not like to humble them."

"Besides, your duchess is still taking the waters, is she not?"

"Still," replied Porthos. "Now the Governor of the province, one of the gentlemen I was expecting to dinner, appeared so desirous of having him, that I made him a present of the horse."

"Gave him away?" exclaimed D'Artagnan.

"Yes, gave him away, you may well say so," said Porthos; "for he was worth quite a hundred and fifty louis, and the skinflint would give me but eighty."

"Without the saddle?" said Aramis.

"Yes, without the saddle."

"You will observe, gentlemen, that after all it is Porthos who has made the best bargain."

Then followed roars of laughter, at which poor Porthos was greatly astonished; but when the cause was explained, he joined in noisily, as was his wont.

"So that we are all in funds," said D'Artagnan.

"Not for my part," said Athos; "I found the Spanish wine of Aramis so good that I had sixty bottles of it placed in the wagon with the lackeys, which has much reduced my capital."

"And I," said Aramis; "just fancy, I gave my last sou to the church of Montdidier and the Jesuits of Amiens. I had ordered masses for myself and for you, gentlemen, and was obliged to pay for them."

"And I," said Porthos; "do you think that my sprain has cost me nothing? Without counting Mousqueton's wound, for which I was obliged to have a surgeon twice a day, who made me pay double, on the pretext that Mousqueton had been wounded in a place which one does not generally show to apothecaries. I have strongly recommended him never to get wounded there again."

"Good!" said Athos, exchanging a smile with Aramis and

D'Artagnan, " I see that you acted very generously toward the poor fellow."

" In short, my expenses paid, I shall have thirty crowns left."

" And I ten pistoles," said Aramis.

" Well," said Athos, " it seems that we are the wealthy members of the company. How much remains out of your hundred pistoles, D'Artagnan ? "

" Out of my hundred pistoles ? In the first place, I gave you fifty."

" That's true, I remember now."

" Then I paid the host six."

" That fellow ! why did you give him six pistoles ? "

" Because you asked me."

" It is true that I am too generous. In short, there re-remains——"

" Twenty-five pistoles," said D'Artagnan.

" And I," said Athos, drawing some small change from his pocket, " I——"

" You nothing."

" So that we shall arrive in Paris with about four hundred livres and our equipment."

" But our chargers ? " said Aramis.

" Well, we will dispose of the four nags of our lackeys, and buy two chargers for which we will draw lots. We will then empty out our pockets, and D'Artagnan, who is lucky, will go and stake them at the first gambling-table."

" Let us go on dining," said Porthos ; " everything is getting cold."

The four friends, reassured with regard to the future, did honour to the repast, the remains of which were abandoned to Mousqueton, Bazin, Planchet, and Grimaud.

On arriving in Paris, D'Artagnan found a letter from M. de Tréville, who informed him, that on his request the King had been pleased to grant him the favour of joining the Musketeers.

As this was the height of D'Artagnan's ambitions, apart, of course, from his desire of finding Madame Bonacieux, he ran joyfully to his comrades, whom he had left half an hour before, and found them sad and dejected. M. de Tréville had just informed them that his Majesty having determined to open the campaign on the first of May, they were at once to look to their equipment.

CHAPTER XXVIII

HUNTING FOR EQUIPMENT

THE most preoccupied of the four friends was certainly D'Artagnan, who was almost as vainglorious as Porthos. In addition to his equipment, however, which touched his vanity, his mind was troubled by something less selfish. He had been unable to learn anything concerning Madame Bonacieux. M. de Tréville had spoken to the Queen about her; the Queen knew not what had become of her young tire-woman, and had promised that she should be looked for.

But this promise was vague, and did not reassure D'Artagnan.

Athos did not leave his room; he had made up his mind not to put a foot outside to search for an equipment.

"We have a fortnight," he said to his friends, "and if at the end of that time I have found nothing, or nothing has come to find me, as I am too good a Catholic to blow my brains out, I shall pick a quarrel with four Guards of his Eminence, or with eight Englishmen, and I shall fight until one of them has killed me. They will say that I died for the King, so that I shall have done my duty without needing to equip myself."

Porthos continued to walk up and down, tossing his head, and saying:

"I have an idea."

Aramis, anxious, and with his hair ill-curled, said nothing.

However, as Porthos had an idea, and as he pursued it with obstinacy, he was the first to act. He was a man of execution, this worthy Porthos.

D'Artagnan saw him going one day in the direction of the church of Saint-Leu, and instinctively followed him; he entered the sacred place, after having twisted his moustache, and smoothed his beard, which always bespoke a conquering mood. As D'Artagnan took care to hide himself, Porthos thought that he had not been seen; he went and leaned against a pillar. D'Artagnan, still unperceived, leaned against another.

It so happened that there was a sermon, and consequently the church was crowded. Porthos took advantage of this circumstance to ogle at the women.

D'Artagnan remarked on the bench nearest the pillar against which Porthos was leaning, a sort of ripe beauty, rather yellow and withered, but stiff and haughty under her black headdress.

The eyes of Porthos were lowered furtively on this lady, and then wandered down the nave.

On her side, the lady, who blushed now and then, would throw a lightning glance at the fickle Porthos, whose eyes would then roam all over the assembly.

It was clear that this game piqued the lady, for she bit her lips till the blood came, scratched the tip of her nose, and jumped about in her seat.

Seeing which, Porthos again twirled his moustache and tugged at his beard, and began to make signs to a pretty woman who was near to the choir, and who was not only beautiful, but was no doubt a great lady, for she had behind her a little negro, who had brought the cushion on which she was kneeling, and a waiting-maid, who held a bag, on which was worked a coat of arms, and in which her prayer-book was carried.

The lady in the black headdress followed the glances of Porthos, and noticed that they fell on the lady with the velvet cushion, the negro, and the serving-maid.

Meanwhile, Porthos played a close game ; he winked, he placed his fingers on his lips, and indulged in little killing smiles, which in reality killed the disdained beauty.

So by way of a *mea culpa*, and beating her breast, she uttered a " Hum ! " so loud that every one, and even the lady of the velvet cushion, looked round.

Porthos held out : he had perfectly understood, but he pretended to be deaf.

The lady with the red cushion greatly disturbed the lady with the black headdress, for she was very lovely, and was evidently a rival to be feared ; greatly disturbed Porthos, who found her much prettier than the lady in the black headdress ; greatly disturbed D'Artagnan, who recognized in her the lady of Meung, of Calais, and of Dover, whom his persecutor, the man with the scar, had called Milady.

D'Artagnan, without losing sight of the lady with the red cushion, continued to watch the game of Porthos, which greatly amused him. He guessed that the lady in the black headdress was the Procurator's wife of the Rue aux Ours.

The sermon concluded, the Procurator's wife advanced toward the holy water, but Porthos was beforehand with her, and instead of a finger, dipped in his whole hand.

The Procurator's wife smiled, thinking that Porthos had done this for her, but she was promptly and cruelly undeceived.

When she was about three paces from him, he turned away,

following with his eyes the lady of the red cushion, who had risen, and was approaching, followed by her negro and her waiting-maid.

When she was near him Porthos drew his dripping hand out of the holy water; the fair devotee touched with her taper fingers the large hand of Porthos, and smiling, made the sign of the Cross, and left the church.

This was too much for the wife of the Procurator. She felt certain as to the relations existing between this lady and Porthos.

If she had been a great lady she would have fainted, but as she was only the wife of a procurator, she satisfied herself by saying, with concentrated fury, to the musketeer:

"Eh, M. Porthos! you offer me no holy water!"

Porthos started at the sound of her voice like a man aroused from a sleep of a hundred years.

"Ma—madame!" he exclaimed, "is it really you? How is your husband, that dear M. Coquenard? Is he as stingy as ever? Where were my eyes, that I did not see you during the sermon?"

"I was within two steps of you, sir," replied the Procurator's wife, "but you did not see me, because you had eyes for no one but the pretty woman to whom you gave holy water."

Porthos pretended to be taken aback.

"Ah!" said he, "you noticed——"

"Surely I am not blind, sir!"

"Yes," said Porthos, "she is a duchess who is very difficult to meet, in consequence of the jealousy of her husband, and who sent word that she would come to-day, simply to see me, in this poor church, in an out-of-the-way quarter."

"M. Porthos," said the Procurator's wife, "will you have the kindness to offer me your arm for five minutes? I should like to talk to you."

"Certainly, madame," said Porthos, chuckling to himself.

At this moment D'Artagnan passed, following Milady; he glanced at Porthos, and saw his smile of triumph.

"Ha!" he said to himself, reasoning after the easy morals of the period, "that fellow will probably be equipped in time."

Porthos, yielding to the pressure of the lady's arm as the vessel yields to the rudder, arrived at the cloisters Saint-Magloire, a little frequented passage, closed by a turnstile at each end.

"Ah, M. Porthos!" exclaimed the Procurator's wife, as soon as she thought that no one could see or hear, "you are a great conqueror, it appears."

"I, madame?" said Porthos, drawing himself up; "and why so?"

"And those signals just now? and the holy water? I suppose she is at least a princess, this lady with the negro boy and the chambermaid."

"You are mistaken," replied Porthos, "she is merely a duchess."

"And the runner who was waiting at the door, and the carriage, with a coachman in grand livery on the box?"

Porthos had seen neither the runner nor the carriage, but the jealous Madame Coquenard had seen everything.

"Ah! you are the women's darling, M. Porthos," sighed the lady.

"You can understand," replied Porthos, "that endowed as I am by nature, I meet with success."

"*Mon Dieu!* how quickly men forget!" cried the Procurator's wife, raising her eyes to heaven.

"Less quickly than women," replied Porthos; "for at least I, madame, can say that I was your victim, when wounded, dying, given over by the surgeons, I, the scion of a noble family, who had placed confidence in your friendship, was left to die of my wounds first, and then of hunger, in a miserable inn at Chantilly, without your condescending to reply to one of my burning letters."

"But, M. Porthos," murmured the Procurator's wife, who felt that she was in the wrong.

"Madame Coquenard," said Porthos, "remember the first letter which you wrote to me, and which is engraven in my memory."

The Procurator's wife uttered a groan.

"Remember that the sum which you asked to borrow was not a small one."

"Madame Coquenard, I gave you the preference. I should only have had to write to the Duchess of —— I will not mention her name; but she would at once have sent me fifteen hundred."

The Procurator's wife shed a tear.

"M. Porthos," she said, "I swear to you that you have amply punished me, and that if you find yourself again in similar straits you will only have to apply to me."

"Fie, madame!" said Porthos, in an offended tone; "let us not talk of money, if you please; it is humiliating."

"Then, you no longer love me!" said the lady, slowly and sadly.

Porthos preserved a majestic silence.

"It is thus that you reply? Alas! I understand."

"Think of the offence you have been guilty of toward me, madame; it remains there," said Porthos, placing his hand on his heart.

"I will repair it; come now, my dear Porthos!"

"Besides, what did I ask for?" said Porthos, with a slight shrug of the shoulders—"a loan, and nothing more. After all, I am not unreasonable. I know that you are not rich, and that your husband is obliged to bleed his poor clients in order to extract a few crowns from them. Oh! if you were a countess or a duchess, your conduct would be unpardonable."

The Procurator's wife was piqued.

"Know, M. Porthos," she said, "that my strong box is perhaps better lined than those of the ruined minxes of whom you speak."

"You have doubly offended me, then," said Porthos, withdrawing his arm; "for if you are rich, Madame Coquenard, there is no excuse for your refusal."

"When I say rich, I mean to say that I am well-to-do."

"Alas, madame!" said Porthos, in the most melancholy tone he could assume, "when we are about to enter on a campaign, in which I have a presentiment that I shall be killed——"

"Oh, do not talk like that!" cried the Procurator's wife, bursting into tears.

"Something tells me so," said Porthos, becoming more and more melancholy.

"Say, rather, that you have a new love."

"No; I will speak openly. No new object has touched my heart, at the bottom of which I feel something that speaks of you. But in a fortnight, as you are perhaps aware, this fatal campaign will open. Until then I shall be terribly busy with my equipment. Then I must go to Brittany to see my family, so as to raise the sum necessary for my departure."

Porthos watched the last struggle between love and avarice.

"And as," he continued, "the duchess whom you saw owns the property next to ours, we shall travel together."

"You have, then, no friends in Paris, M. Porthos?"

"I thought that I had, but I see that I was mistaken."

"No, you have some, M. Porthos; you have some," exclaimed the lady, in a transport which surprised even herself. "Come to the house to-morrow. You are the son of my aunt, and consequently my cousin; you come from Noyon, in Picardy; you have several lawsuits in Paris, and no counsel. Will you remember all that?"

" Perfectly, madame."

" Come at dinner-time, and be on your guard in the presence of my husband, who is shrewd, in spite of his seventy-six years."

" Seventy-six ! *Peste !* what a fine age ! "

" A great age, you mean, M. Porthos. Therefore, the poor dear man may leave me a widow at any moment," said Madame Coquenard, looking significantly at Porthos. " Fortunately by the marriage contract everything has been settled on the last survivor."

" Everything ? " said Porthos.

" Everything."

" I see that you are a woman of precaution," said Porthos, pressing her hand.

" We are then reconciled, dear M. Porthos ? " said Madame Coquenard, in a mincing manner.

" For life," said Porthos, in the same tone.

" *Au revoir*, then, deceiver."

" *Au revoir*, forgetful one."

" Till to-morrow, my angel."

" Till to-morrow, breath of my life ! "

CHAPTER XXIX

MILADY

D'ARTAGNAN had followed Milady without her noticing him ; he saw her get into her carriage, and heard her tell her coachman to drive to Saint-Germain.

It was useless attempting to follow the carriage on foot, and so D'Artagnan returned to the Rue Férou. In the Rue de la Seine he met Planchet standing before a pastrycook's shop. He ordered him to go and saddle two horses in the stables of M. de Tréville.

D'Artagnan and Planchet were soon mounted and took the road to Saint-Germain. All along the road thoughts of Madame Bonacieux recurred to the mind of the young man. Although D'Artagnan was not sentimental, the pretty tire-woman had made a deep impression on his heart. In the meantime he was going to find out all about Milady. Milady had spoken to the gentleman in the black cloak ; therefore she knew him. Now, it was the opinion of D'Artagnan that this man had carried off Madame Bonacieux, both the first and the second time.

D'Artagnan, thinking over this, gave his horse a touch with his spur from time to time, and soon accomplished his short journey to Saint-Germain. He had just reached the pavilion where ten years later Louis XIV was born, and was looking right and left for some sign of the lovely Englishwoman, when he saw a form he knew walking on a sort of terrace, ornamented with flowers. Planchet was the first to recognize it.

"Eh, sir," he said to D'Artagnan, "do you not remember that face?"

"No," replied D'Artagnan; "but it is not the first time that I have seen it."

"I should just think so," said Planchet; "it is that poor Lubin, the lackey of the Comte de Wardes, whom you laid out a month ago at Calais."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan; "I recognize him now. Do you think he will recognize you?"

"Indeed, he was so distracted, sir, that I doubt if he has retained a clear impression of me."

"Well, go and speak to him, and find out whether his master is dead."

Planchet alighted and went straight to Lubin, who did not recognize him, and the two lackeys entered into friendly conversation.

D'Artagnan took up a post of observation behind a hedge, and saw Milady arrive in her carriage. D'Artagnan bent down on his horse's neck, so as not to be seen.

Milady put her beautiful fair head out of the window to give her orders to a waiting-maid, who jumped down from her seat and went in the direction of the terrace.

D'Artagnan followed the pretty soubrette with his eyes. Just then Lubin was summoned from within, so that Planchet remained alone, looking round for D'Artagnan.

The waiting-maid approached Planchet, whom she mistook for Lubin, and handed him a little note, saying:

"For your master."

"For my master?" asked Planchet, astonished.

"Yes; and very urgent. Come, take it!"

Upon which she ran back, and jumped upon the step of the carriage, which drove away.

Planchet turned the note over and over; then, accustomed to passive obedience, jumped down from the terrace, and, finding his master, said, presenting the note:

"For you, sir."

" For me ? " said D'Artagnan ; " are you very sure ? "

" *Pardieu !* the maid said, ' For your master ' ; and I have no master but you. A pretty wench, that maid ! "

D'Artagnan opened the letter, and read these words :

A person who takes more interest in you than she can say would like to know what day you will be able to walk in the forest. To-morrow at the Hôtel of the Champ-du-Drap-d'Or a lackey in black and red will await your answer.

" Ha ! " said D'Artagnan, " this is rather good. It seems that Milady and I are anxious about the health of the same person. Well, Planchet, how is the Count ? He isn't dead, then ? "

" No, sir ; but he is still very weak, having lost a great deal of blood. As I told you, sir, Lubin did not recognize me, and related the whole affair."

" Very good, Planchet ; you are the king of lackeys. Now let us mount again and overtake the carriage."

This did not take long. At the end of five minutes they caught sight of the carriage drawn up on the side of the road, and a richly dressed horseman standing at the door.

The conversation between Milady and the horseman was so animated that D'Artagnan pulled up on the other side of the carriage without being noticed by any but the maid. They were speaking in English, which language the young man did not understand ; but he could tell that the pretty Englishwoman was very angry—a movement she made left no doubt about this : she struck her companion so violent a blow with her fan, that it broke into pieces.

The man burst out into laughter, which appeared to exasperate Milady.

D'Artagnan thought this the right moment to intervene ; he approached the other window, and taking off his hat respectfully, said :

" Permit me, madame, to offer you my services. It seems to me that this gentleman has angered you. Say the word, madame, and I will undertake to punish his lack of courtesy."

At his first words Milady turned round, looking at the young man with astonishment, and she answered in very good French when he had finished :

" Sir, it would give me great pleasure to place myself under your protection, if the person with whom I am quarrelling were not my brother."

" Ah, excuse me then, madame ! " said D'Artagnan ; " I was ignorant of the fact."

" What is that donkey meddling with ? " cried the gentleman ; " why does he not proceed on his way ? "

" Donkey yourself ! " said D'Artagnan, replying from the other side of the carriage. " I do not proceed on my way because it suits me to remain here."

The cavalier spoke some words in English to his sister.

" I spoke to you in French," said D'Artagnan, " and I beg you will do me the honour to reply in the same language. You may be the brother of madame, but fortunately you are not mine."

It might have been thought that Milady, timid as women generally are, would have interfered to prevent a quarrel ; but, on the contrary, she threw herself back in her carriage, and coolly told her coachman to drive home.

The pretty waiting-maid threw an uneasy glance at D'Artagnan, whose handsome appearance seemed to have produced an effect upon her.

The carriage having gone, the two men were left face to face without any material obstacle between them.

The stranger made a movement to follow the carriage ; but D'Artagnan, whose rage, already boiling over, was increased when he recognized in him the Englishman who had won his horse at Amiens, and had nearly won his diamond from Athos, seized his bridle and stopped him.

" Hey, sir ! " he said, " you appear to be a greater donkey than I am, for you forget that there is a little dispute to be settled between us."

" Ah ! " said the Englishman, " is it you, young man ? You must always be at one game or another ? "

" Yes ; and that reminds me that I have my revenge to take. We shall see if you handle the rapier as well as the dice-box."

" You see that I have no sword," said the Englishman. " Do you wish to play the braggart with an unarmed man ? "

" I hope that you have one at home," replied D'Artagnan. " At any rate, I have two, and if you like we will play for one."

" There is no need," said the Englishman ; " I am well provided."

" Well, my good sir," said D'Artagnan, " choose the longest you have, and come and show it me this evening."

" And where, if you please ? "

" Behind the Luxembourg ; it is a charming quarter for such promenades as the one I propose."

"Very well, I shall be there."

"Your hour?"

"Six o'clock."

"*A propos*, you have probably one or two friends?"

"I have three who will feel great honour in taking a hand in my game."

"Three? that suits capitally!" said D'Artagnan. "I have three also!"

"Now, who are you?" asked the Englishman.

"I am M. d'Artagnan, a Gascon gentleman, in M. des Essarts' company of the Guards; and you?"

"I am Lord de Winter, Baron Sheffield."

"Well, then, I am your servant, Baron," said D'Artagnan, "although you have names very difficult to remember."

And spurring his horse, he galloped off on the road to Paris.

As was his wont on such occasions, D'Artagnan alighted at the house of Athos. He found him lying on a sofa, waiting, as he said, for his equipment to come and find him. He told Athos all that had happened, except what concerned the letter to M. de Wardes.

Athos was delighted when he heard that he was going to fight with an Englishman. We have said that this was his constant desire.

They sent at once for Porthos and Aramis, and acquainted them with the position of affairs. Porthos drew his sword from its sheath and began to lunge at the wall. Aramis, who was still busy on his poem, shut himself up in the study of Athos, so as not to be disturbed until the hour arrived to cross swords. Athos made a sign to Grimaud to bring him another bottle.

As for D'Artagnan, he evolved a little plan, the execution of which we shall tell of later on, and which promised to be a pleasant adventure, judging from the smiles which from time to time flitted across his face.

CHAPTER XXX

FRENCH AND ENGLISH

WHEN the time came, the four musketeers, with their lackeys, went to the enclosure behind the Luxembourg. The lackeys were told off for sentry duty.

Soon a silent band approached the same enclosure, and joined

the musketeers ; then, according to English custom, presentations took place.

The Englishmen were all persons of high rank ; the strange names of their adversaries not only surprised them, but rendered them uneasy.

" But after all," said Lord de Winter, when the three friends had named themselves, " we do not know who you are ! We cannot fight against names like those, names fit only for shepherds ! "

" As you may suppose, my lord, they are assumed names," said Athos.

" Which gives us all the greater desire to know the real names," replied the Englishman.

" You played with us without knowing our names," returned Athos, " and won our two horses."

" That is true ; but we only risked our pistoles ; this time we risk our blood. People can play with anyone, but they fight only with their equals."

" That is just," said Athos ; and he called aside the Englishman with whom he was to fight, and whispered his name to him.

Porthos and Aramis did the same.

" Are you satisfied ? " said Athos to his adversary ; " and do you find me noble enough to measure swords with me ? "

" Yes, sir," said the Englishman, bowing.

" And now I will tell you something," said Athos coldly.

" What ? " asked the Englishman.

" That you would have done well not to insist on knowing who I am."

" Why ? "

" Because I am supposed to be dead, and have reasons for wishing that no one should know that I am alive. I shall therefore be obliged to kill you, lest my secret be betrayed."

The Englishman looked at Athos, thinking that he was joking ; but Athos was not joking in the least.

" Gentlemen," said Athos, addressing his comrades and his adversaries ; " are we ready ? "

" Yes," replied with one voice Englishmen and Frenchmen.

And immediately eight swords flashed in the sun, and the combat began, with a bitterness very natural between men who were doubly enemies.

Athos, the first, killed his adversary, as he had warned him ; he ran him through the heart.

Porthos, the second, stretched his adversary on the grass; he had run him through the thigh.

Aramis attacked his so vigorously, that, after falling back fifty paces, he fairly took to his heels, and disappeared amid the hoots of the lackeys.

As for D'Artagnan, he acted purely on the defensive until, having tired out his adversary, he disarmed him by a turn of the wrist.

The Baron stepped backward, but his foot slipped, and he fell.

D'Artagnan sprang upon him, and, putting his sword to his throat, said: "I might kill you, sir, for you are in my hands; but I spare you, for the love of your sister."

D'Artagnan was delighted with himself; he had just realized the plan which he had meditated.

The Englishman, glad to have to do with a gentleman of so kindly a disposition, clasped D'Artagnan in his arms, and showed every courtesy to the three musketeers.

"And now, my young friend, for I hope you will permit me to give you that name," said Lord de Winter, "if you like, I will present you to my sister, Lady Clarick, this evening. I hope that she will take you into her good graces, and as she is in favour at Court, perhaps a word from her may be useful to you."

D'Artagnan flushed with pleasure, and bowed his assent.

Lord de Winter, on leaving D'Artagnan, gave him his sister's address in the Place Royale. Besides, he offered to come and fetch him, in order to present him. D'Artagnan arranged to meet him at eight o'clock.

This introduction to Milady greatly occupied the mind of our Gascon.

He remembered in what a strange manner this woman had been mixed up with his destiny. He was convinced that she was in the service of the Cardinal, yet he felt drawn toward her by a feeling which he could not define.

His only fear was that Milady should recognize him as the man of Meung and of Dover. She would then know that he was a friend of M. de Tréville, and devoted body and soul to the King, and this would put him at a disadvantage.

As for the intrigue between her and the Comte de Wardes, our presumptuous Gascon took little heed of that, although the Count was young, handsome, rich, and high in the favour of the Cardinal.

D'Artagnan began by going home to array himself in his best. Then he repaired to the rooms of Athos, and unbosomed himself,

Athos listened, shook his head, and recommended prudence with a shade of bitterness.

"What!" he said, "you have just lost a woman whom you described as good, charming, perfect, and you immediately begin to run after another!"

D'Artagnan felt the justice of this reproach.

"I loved Madame Bonacieux with my heart, while I love Milady with my head," he said. "And my chief object in going to see her is to find out the part that she plays at Court."

"*Pardieu!* That is not difficult to guess, after all you have told me. She is an emissary of the Cardinal, who will draw you into a snare where you will leave your head."

"*Diable!* My dear Athos, you take a gloomy view of affairs."

"My dear fellow, I distrust women, and, above all, fair women. I had a lesson. Milady is fair, you said?"

"Yes; she has the most splendid head of hair I have ever seen."

"Ah, my poor D'Artagnan!" exclaimed Athos.

"I only want to obtain information, and, that done, I shall retire."

Lord de Winter arrived at the hour agreed upon, but Athos, warned in time, went into another room. He therefore found D'Artagnan alone, and took the young man away with him.

An elegant carriage was at the door, which conveyed them rapidly to the Place Royale.

Milady received D'Artagnan gravely.

Her *hôtel* was sumptuously furnished; and although most of the English, driven away by the war, had left, or were on the point of leaving France, Milady had just laid out more money, which showed that the general measure regarding Englishmen did not affect her.

"You see," said Lord de Winter, presenting D'Artagnan to his sister, "a young gentleman who held my life in his hands, and who would not abuse his advantage, although we were doubly enemies, seeing that it was I who insulted him, and that I am an Englishman. Thank him, madame, if you have some friendship for me."

Milady frowned slightly; an almost imperceptible cloud passed over her brow, and a smile so strange appeared on her lips, that the young man felt a kind of shudder.

The brother saw nothing; he had turned round to play with Milady's favourite monkey.

"You are welcome, sir," said Milady, in a voice whose sweetness

presented a singular contrast to the symptoms of ill-humour detected by D'Artagnan ; " you have acquired rights to my everlasting gratitude."

The Englishman then turned round and related the combat, without omitting a single detail.

Milady listened with the greatest attention ; however, it was easy to see that, no matter what effort she made to hide her impressions, the story did not please her. The blood rose to her face, and her little foot beat impatiently under her dress.

Lord de Winter noticed nothing. When he had finished, he took a bottle of Spanish wine from a tray, filled two glasses, and invited D'Artagnan to drink.

D'Artagnan took the second glass, but he had not lost sight of Milady, and observed in the looking-glass the change which had come over her face.

Now that she thought no one was looking at her, a sort of ferocity animated her features. She bit her handkerchief furiously.

The pretty little waiting-maid whom D'Artagnan had already noticed, then entered, and said a few words in English to Lord de Winter, who immediately asked D'Artagnan to excuse him, as he was called away on an urgent affair.

D'Artagnan shook hands with him and returned to Milady. Her face, with surprising mobility, had recovered its gracious expression, but a few red spots on her handkerchief showed that she had bitten her lips till the blood came.

The conversation took a playful turn. Milady appeared to have entirely recovered her self-possession.

She told D'Artagnan that Lord de Winter was only her brother-in-law, and not her brother ; that she had married a younger son, who had left her a widow with a child, which child was the heir of Lord de Winter, if he did not marry. Under all this D'Artagnan scented some mystery, but, for the present, he could not lift the veil.

But after half an hour's conversation, D'Artagnan became persuaded that Milady was his compatriot. She spoke French with a purity and elegance which left no doubt on this head.

D'Artagnan was profuse in gallant sayings and protestations of devotion, which made Milady smile. The hour to withdraw arrived. D'Artagnan took his leave, and left the room the happiest of men.

On the stairs he met the pretty soubrette, who brushed against him as she passed, and then blushingly begged his pardon for

touching him. Her voice was so sweet that she was pardoned at once.

The next day D'Artagnan returned, and was received even better than the evening before. Lord de Winter was not there, and it was Milady who did the honours. She appeared to take great interest in him ; asked him whence he came, who were his friends, and if he did not sometimes think of attaching himself to the Cardinal.

D'Artagnan, who, as we know, was very prudent for a lad of twenty, recalled his suspicions concerning Milady. He spoke in the highest terms of his Eminence, and said that he would have joined the Guards of the Cardinal instead of the Guards of the King, had he known M. de Cavois instead of M. de Tréville.

Milady changed the conversation, and with affected carelessness asked D'Artagnan whether he had ever been in England.

D'Artagnan replied that he had been sent by M. de Tréville to purchase horses, and that he had brought back four as specimens. Milady bit her lip ; she had met her match.

At the same hour as the day before, D'Artagnan retired. In the gallery he again met the pretty Kitty, who looked at him with an expression which it was impossible to mistake. But D'Artagnan was so taken up with the mistress, that he could not notice the maid.

D'Artagnan returned the next day and the day after, and each evening Milady received him in the most gracious manner. Every evening he met the pretty soubrette in the anteroom, in the corridor, or on the stair. But D'Artagnan paid no attention to the persistence of poor Kitty.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE PROCURATOR'S DINNER

THE duel in which Porthos had taken so brilliant a part had not made him forget his dinner with the Procurator's wife. The next day at one o'clock he took the road to the Rue aux Ours. His heart was beating, but not like that of D'Artagnan, with a young and impatient love. No ; a more material interest quickened his pulse ; he was at last about to cross that mysterious threshold, to climb that unknown stair, which the crowns of Master Coquenard had ascended one by one.

He was about to see in reality a certain chest which had often

appeared to him in his dreams—a long, deep, padlocked, bolted chest, of which he had often heard, and which the Procurator's wife was about to expose to his admiring gaze. Then he, a wanderer on the face of the earth, a man without fortune or family, a soldier, accustomed to inns, wineshops and taverns, he was about to taste a family repast and enjoy the comforts of a home.

To come in the guise of a cousin, and sit down every day at a good table, to enliven the yellow and wrinkled brow of the Procurator, and fleece the clerks while teaching them card games; all this tickled Porthos immensely.

The musketeer remembered that he had heard a good many things said about procurators, of their stinginess, their cheeseparing, and their fast-days; but after all, with the exception of a few fits of economy, Porthos had always found the Procurator's wife sufficiently liberal; he therefore hoped to find a well-appointed establishment.

Yet at the door the musketeer had some doubts; the precincts were not alluring; a dark, foul passage, an ill-lighted stair; on the first floor a low door studded with enormous nails, like the principal gate of the Grand Châtelet prison.

Porthos knocked with his finger; a tall, pale clerk with a virgin forest of hair opened the door. There was a small clerk behind the first, a taller clerk behind the second, and an errand-boy of twelve behind the third. In all, three clerks and a half, which bespoke a good business.

Although the musketeer was not due until one o'clock, the wife of the Procurator had since noon been on the look-out, counting that the heart and perhaps the stomach of her lover would induce him to be before his time.

So Madame Coquenard was ready to receive him, and the appearance of the worthy lady was a great relief to him.

The clerks eyed him with curiosity, and not knowing what to say to that ascending and descending scale, he remained mute.

"It is my cousin," cried the Procurator's wife. "Come in, come in, M. Porthos."

The name of Porthos tickled the clerks, who began to laugh; but Porthos turned, and their faces recovered their gravity.

They reached the study of the Procurator, after passing through the antechamber in which were the clerks, and the dingy office in which they ought to have been.

"It appears that we are cousins, M. Porthos," said the Procurator, rising with difficulty. "By the female line, I believe?" he added, maliciously.

Porthos did not understand this piece of banter, and taking it for simplicity, laughed in his heavy moustache. Madame Coquenard, who knew that simplicity in a procurator was very rare, smiled a little and blushed a good deal.

Master Coquenard had, on the arrival of Porthos, glanced with uneasiness at a large chest placed opposite his oak writing-table. Porthos understood that this chest, although it did not answer by its form to those he had seen in his dreams, must be the blessed strong box, and he congratulated himself that the reality was six feet higher than the vision.

Master Coquenard did not push his genealogical investigations any further, but withdrawing his eyes from the chest, and fixing them on Porthos, he contented himself with saying :

" Our cousin, before starting on the campaign, will be good enough to dine with us once, will he not, Madame Coquenard ? "

This time Porthos received the blow full in the stomach ; nor was Madame Coquenard insensible to it, for she added :

" My cousin will not return if he finds that we treat him badly ; but if he is well treated, he has too little time to pass in Paris for us not to ask him to give us every moment of which he can dispose."

Soon the dinner hour arrived, and they passed into a large but dingy dining-room situated opposite the kitchen.

The clerks, who had smelt an unaccustomed fragrance about the house, were of military punctuality ; they stood, stools in hand, ready to sit down, and moving their jaws in a manner which threatened fearful consequences.

Porthos thought, as he looked at the famishing clerks, that his cousin was wrong to keep such gluttons. They looked like shipwrecked mariners who had not eaten for six weeks.

Master Coquenard entered, pushed by his wife in a chair on wheels, and Porthos helped to wheel her husband to table. The Procurator had hardly entered when he began to move his jaws like the clerks.

" Oh ! " he said ; " what tempting soup ! "

" What the devil do they find so extraordinary in the smell of the soup ? " wondered Porthos, at the sight of a pale liquid, in which a few crusts floated like scattered islands.

Madame Coquenard smiled, and on a sign from her every one sat down eagerly.

Master Coquenard was served first, then Porthos, then Madame Coquenard filled her plate, and distributed the crusts, without soup, to the clerks. After the soup the servant brought in a

boiled fowl, a piece of magnificence which made the diners open their eyes wide.

"It is easy to see that you love your family, Madame Coquenard," said the Procurator, with an almost tragic smile; "you treat your cousin very handsomely!"

The poor hen was fleshless, and covered with one of those tough, bristly skins through which the bones, in spite of all their efforts, can never force their way. It must have been dragged from the perch whither she had retired to die of old age.

"*Diable!*" thought Porthos, "this looks bad. I respect old age, but I don't think much of it either boiled or roasted."

He looked round to see if his opinion were shared; he saw, however, nothing but sparkling eyes, feasting beforehand on this sublime fowl, the object of his contempt.

Madame Coquenard took the dish, cut off the two black feet for her husband; put the neck and the head on a plate for herself, and helped Porthos to a wing. The remainder of the animal was handed back to the servant, who had disappeared with it before the musketeer had time to examine the various expressions which disappointment brings to the faces of those who experience it.

After the fowl came an enormous dish of beans in which were a few mutton bones, which one might have thought, at first, to be accompanied by some meat. But the clerks were not taken in, and their lugubrious faces became resigned. Madame Coquenard helped the clerks with the moderation befitting a good housekeeper.

The time came for taking wine. Master Coquenard poured out from a small stone bottle the third of a glass for each of the young men, took about the same quantity himself, and then passed the bottle to Porthos and Madame Coquenard.

Porthos timidly consumed the wing of the fowl, and shuddered when he felt under the table the knee of the Procurator's wife. He drank half a glass of wine, which he recognized as that horrible Montreuil, the terror of knowing palates. Master Coquenard saw him gulp it down and sighed.

"Will you have some beans, cousin?" asked Madame Coquenard, in that tone which plainly means: "Take my advice, don't touch them."

"The devil take me, if I taste them," said Porthos to himself. Then aloud—"No, thank you, cousin, I am no longer hungry."

There was silence. Porthos did not know what to do. The Procurator repeated several times:

" Ah ! Madame Coquenard, I must congratulate you ; your dinner was a regular feast. Gracious, how I have eaten ! "

Master Coquenard, after what he called the excesses of this repast, felt inclined for a nap.

Porthos hoped that he would enjoy it then and there. But the cursed Procurator insisted on being taken to his study and placed before his chest, on the edge of which he placed his feet by way of precaution.

Madame Coquenard took Porthos into an adjoining room, and began to pave the way for their reconciliation.

" You can come and dine three times a week," she said.

" Thanks," said Porthos ; " I don't like abusing your kindness ; besides, I must look after my equipment."

" That's true," said the lady, groaning ; " that unfortunate equipment."

" Alas, yes ! " said Porthos.

" But what does the equipment of your corps consist of ? "

" Oh ! a good many things ; the Musketeers, as you know, are picked soldiers, and they require many objects which would be useless in the Guards or the Swiss regiment."

" But give me details."

" Well, it may mount up to——" said Porthos, who preferred discussing the total.

Madame Coquenard waited in a tremble.

" To how much ? " she asked ; " I hope it does not exceed——"

She stopped ; her speech failed her.

" Oh, no ! " said Porthos, " it does not exceed two thousand, five hundred livres ; in fact, with economy, two thousand will be sufficient."

" Good heavens ! two thousand livres ! Why, that is a fortune ! "

Porthos made a significant grimace, which Madame Coquenard understood.

" I asked for details," she said, " because, having a good many relations and clients in business, I am sure of being able to purchase what you require fifty per cent. cheaper than you could yourself."

" Ah ! " said Porthos ; " if that is what you mean ! "

" Yes, dear M. Porthos ; for instance, you require, first of all, a horse ? "

" Yes, a horse."

" Well, I know of one."

"Ah!" said Porthos, brightening up. "So much for the horse; then I require the accoutrements, which are composed of objects which a musketeer alone can purchase, and will cost over three hundred livres."

"Then let us put down three hundred livres," said Madame Coquenard, with a sigh.

Porthos smiled. It will be remembered that he had the saddle which came from the Duke of Buckingham, so this would be three hundred livres of pocket-money.

"Then," he continued, "there is a horse for my lackey, and my valise."

"A horse for your lackey! That is doing things on a very grand scale!"

"Why, madame!" said Porthos proudly, "am I a beggar?"

"No; I only wished to say that a good mule often looks as well as a horse; and it appears to me that in procuring a good mule for Mousqueton——"

"Let it be a mule then," said Porthos; "you are right, I have seen Spanish grandees with their whole retinue on mules. But you understand, Madame Coquenard, a mule with plumes and bells."

"Make your mind easy."

"There remains the valise."

"Oh, don't trouble your mind about that!" cried Madame Coquenard; "my husband has five or six, and you can take the best."

"Is it empty?" asked Porthos.

"Of course it is," replied Madame Coquenard.

"But the valise I require must be well stocked, my dear."

Madame Coquenard heaved fresh sighs.

At length the remainder of the equipment was haggled over, and the result was that Madame Coquenard promised to give 800 livres in money, together with a horse and a mule.

These conditions drawn up, Porthos took leave of Madame Coquenard, who would fain have detained him longer; but Porthos urged duty, and that the Procurator's wife had to yield to the King.

The musketeer returned home hungry and out of temper.

CHAPTER XXXII

MAID AND MISTRESS

MEANWHILE, as we have said, in spite of the cries of his conscience and the wise counsels of Athos, D'Artagnan became hourly more in love with Milady; he never failed to go and pay her his addresses, to which our bold Gascon was convinced that she would sooner or later respond.

One evening that he arrived holding his head high, and with a heart as light as a man who expects a shower of gold, he met the maid at the entrance.

This time pretty Kitty was not satisfied with touching him; she gently took him by the hand.

"If you would please follow me, sir," said Kitty timidly.

"Wherever you wish, my pretty child."

"Then come."

And Kitty, who had not released D'Artagnan's hand, led him to a winding stair, and, after taking him up fifteen steps, opened a door.

"Come in, sir," she said; "we shall be quite alone, and able to talk."

"And what is this chamber?" asked D'Artagnan.

"It is mine, sir, and it communicates with that of my mistress by that door. But fear nothing; she will not hear us, for she never goes to bed before midnight."

D'Artagnan cast a rapid glance round him. The little room was charming in taste and neatness; but, in spite of himself, his eyes fixed on the door which Kitty said led to the chamber of Milady.

Kitty guessed what was passing in the mind of the young man, and heaved a sigh.

"You love my mistress very much, sir?" said she.

"Oh, more than I can tell you, Kitty; I am madly in love with her."

Kitty sighed again.

"Alas, sir!" she said, "it is a great pity."

"And why such a pity?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Because," replied Kitty, "my mistress does not love you in the least."

And Kitty drew a little note from her bosom.

"For me?" said D'Artagnan, snatching hold of the letter.

"No, for another."

"His name, his name!"

"Look at the address."

"M. le Comte de Wardes."

The recollection of the scene at Saint-Germain instantly flashed across the mind of the presumptuous Gascon. In a flash he tore the envelope, in spite of the cry uttered by Kitty.

"Oh, my God, sir! what have you done?" said she.

"I? nothing," said D'Artagnan; and he read:

> You have not answered my first note; are you ill, or have you forgotten how you looked at me at the ball of Madame de Guise? Here is your opportunity, Count; do not let it escape.

D'Artagnan grew pale; he was wounded in his pride, he thought that it was in his love.

"Poor dear M. d'Artagnan," said Kitty, with a voice full of compassion, and clasping once more the hand of the young man.

"You pity me, my dear?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, with all my heart, for I know what love is."

Then only did D'Artagnan remember Kitty's languishing glances, and her smothered sighs when they met; but, engrossed with his desire to please the great lady, he had disdained the soubrette: "Who hunts the eagle takes no notice of the sparrow."

But this time our Gascon saw at once all the advantages he could derive from the love which Kitty had just acknowledged with so much simplicity or effrontery—letters to the Comte de Wardes intercepted, a friend in the citadel, entry at any hour into Kitty's chamber, which was contiguous to that of Milady.

The perfidious man already sacrificed the young girl in imagination, in order to obtain Milady by consent or by force.

"Well," he said to the young girl, "would you like me, dear Kitty, to give you a proof of the love which you doubt?"

"Of which love?" asked the young girl.

"Of that which I am quite prepared to feel for you."

"And what is that proof?"

"Shall I this evening pass with you the time I usually pass with your mistress?"

"Oh, yes!" said Kitty, clapping her hands, "most willingly."

"Well, my dear," said D'Artagnan, seating himself in an armchair, "come here, and let me tell you that you are the prettiest soubrette I ever saw."

And he told her this so often and so well, that the poor child, who asked nothing better than to believe it, believed. Yet, to

the great astonishment of D'Artagnan, Kitty defended herself with a certain amount of resolution.

Time flies fast when it is passed in attack and defence.

Midnight struck, and almost at the same time they heard the bell ring in Milady's chamber.

" Good gracious ! " cried Kitty, " there is my mistress calling me ! Go ; go quickly ! "

D'Artagnan took up his hat as if to obey, then, opening the door of a cupboard instead of that of the staircase, he stowed himself away among Milady's dresses.

" What are you doing ? " said Kitty.

D'Artagnan, who had taken the key, locked himself in without answering.

" Well ! " cried Milady in a sharp tone, " are you asleep, that you do not come when I ring ? "

And D'Artagnan heard the door opened violently.

" Here I am, Milady ! " cried Kitty, springing forward.

They both went into the bedroom, and as the door between the two rooms remained open, D'Artagnan could hear Milady scolding her maid ; then she softened down, and the conversation turned on him.

" Well," said Milady, " I have not seen our Gascon this evening."

" What, madame," said Kitty, " can he be fickle before being made happy ? "

" Oh, no ! he must have been hindered by M. de Tréville or by M. des Essarts. I have some experience, Kitty, and I have a good hold of him."

" What will madame do with him ? "

" What will I do with him ? Make your mind easy, Kitty ; there is something between that man and me of which he is ignorant. He nearly made me lose favour with his Eminence. Oh ! I shall be revenged ! "

" I thought that madame loved him ? "

" I love him ? I detest him ! A simpleton who held the life of Lord de Winter in his hands, and did not kill him, and made me lose an income of three hundred thousand livres ! "

" That is true," said Kitty ; " your son is the sole heir of his uncle."

D'Artagnan shuddered to his very marrow, on hearing this delicate creature reproach him for not having killed her brother-in-law.

" I should already have revenged myself if, for some reason

which I cannot understand, the Cardinal had not recommended me to spare him."

"Oh, yes! but madame did not spare the little woman he was in love with."

"Oh, the mercer's wife! Has he not forgotten that she ever existed? A fine piece of vengeance that, indeed!"

A cold perspiration inundated D'Artagnan's forehead. This woman was surely a monster!

He listened again, but unfortunately the toilette was finished.

"You can retire now," said Milady, "and endeavour to-morrow to obtain a reply to the letter which I gave you."

"For M. de Wardes?" said Kitty.

"Certainly; for M. de Wardes."

"He appears to me quite the contrary to poor M. d'Artagnan."

"You may go," said Milady; "I do not like comments."

D'Artagnan heard the door shut and bolted by Milady, and on her side Kitty quietly locked the door.

D'Artagnan opened the door of the cupboard.

"Goodness! what is the matter with you?" asked Kitty in a whisper; "how pale you are!"

"The abominable creature!" murmured D'Artagnan.

"Silence! silence! Go," said Kitty; "there is only a thin partition between my chamber and that of Milady, and whatever passes in the one is heard in the other."

"That is just the reason why I shall not go," said D'Artagnan.

"How so?" said Kitty, blushing.

"Or at least I will leave—later."

And he drew Kitty toward him.

There was no possibility of resistance; resistance would have made so much noise. Kitty yielded. This was a piece of vengeance against Milady.

D'Artagnan thought that people were right in saying that vengeance is the pleasure of the gods.

With a little heart, he would have been satisfied with this new conquest, but D'Artagnan had merely ambition and pride.

However, it must be said to his praise, that the first use he made of his influence over Kitty was to try and find out what had become of Madame Bonacieux; but the poor girl swore on the crucifix that she did not know—she believed, however, that she was not dead.

Kitty, too, knew nothing of the reason which had almost made Milady lose the favour of the Cardinal. On this subject D'Artagnan knew more than she did.

What was very clear, however, was that the inveterate hatred of Milady arose from the fact that D'Artagnan had not killed her brother-in-law.

D'Artagnan returned the next day to see Milady, who was in a very bad humour, probably because she had not received an answer from M. de Wardes. Kitty entered, but was received very harshly. However, toward the close of the evening the lovely lioness tamed down: she listened to, and smiled at the soft speeches of D'Artagnan, and gave him her hand to kiss.

D'Artagnan went away not knowing what to think; but as he was not a man to lose his head easily, while paying his addresses to Milady, he had arranged a little plan in his mind.

He found Kitty at the door; and, as the evening before, he went up to her room. Kitty had been scolded and accused of negligence. Milady could not understand the silence of the Comte de Wardes, and had told her to enter her room at nine in the morning for a third letter.

D'Artagnan made Kitty promise to bring it to him. The poor girl promised all that her lover wished. Her head was quite turned.

Everything passed as on the evening before. D'Artagnan shut himself in the cupboard. Milady called, made her toilette, sent Kitty away, and shut the door. D'Artagnan did not get home until five in the morning.

At eleven Kitty arrived, holding in her hand a new letter from Milady. This time the poor girl did not even try to withhold it from D'Artagnan; she allowed him to do what he liked, she belonged body and soul to the handsome soldier.

D'Artagnan opened the note, and read as follows:

> This is the third time that I write to say that I love you; take care that I do not write a fourth time to say that I hate you. If you repent of the manner in which you have acted toward me, the young girl who will hand you this note will tell you in what way a gallant man may obtain his pardon.

D'Artagnan grew red and pale several times while reading this letter.

"Oh, you love her still!" cried Kitty, who had kept her eyes on the young man's face.

"No, Kitty, you are mistaken; but I am determined to revenge myself for her disdain."

"Yes, I know your revenge; you have explained it."

"What can it matter to you, Kitty? you know that it is you alone I love."

"How can one know that?"

"By the contempt that I shall show her."

Kitty sighed.

D'Artagnan took up a pen and wrote:

MADAME,

Up to the present I was in doubt as to whether your two first notes were addressed to me, so unworthy did I deem myself of such an honour. Besides, I was so ill that I should in any case have hesitated to reply; but to-day I am forced to believe in this excess of favour, since not only your letter but your waiting-maid confirm the fact that I have the honour to be loved by you. She need not tell me in what manner a gallant man may obtain his pardon. I will, therefore, go and crave for it at eleven o'clock this evening. To delay another day would, in my eyes, be to offend you again.

He whom you have rendered the happiest of men,

COMTE DE WARDES

"Here," said the young man, handing the note which he had sealed to Kitty, "give that to Milady; it is the answer of M. de Wardes."

Poor Kitty became as pale as death; she suspected what the note contained.

"Listen, my dear child," said D'Artagnan, "you understand that this must finish one way or another. Milady may discover that you handed the first note to my valet, and that I concealed the others; then she will dismiss you, and you know that her vengeance will not stop there."

"Alas!" said Kitty, "and for whom have I exposed myself to all this?"

"For me, my pretty one," said the young man; "therefore I am most grateful, I swear to you."

"But what does your note contain?"

"Milady will tell you."

"Ah, you do not love me!" cried Kitty. "How unhappy I am!"

To this reproach there is an answer by which women are always deceived. D'Artagnan replied in such a way that Kitty's doubts were removed. However, she cried a great deal before she could bring herself to hand the letter to Milady. At last she did consent, and that was all D'Artagnan wanted. He promised to see her early that evening, and this was some comfort to her.

CHAPTER XXXIII

TREATING OF THE EQUIPMENT OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS

SINCE the four friends had set out on the hunt for their equipment they had no regular meetings. However, they had agreed to assemble once a week at the lodgings of Athos, who had sworn not to leave his rooms.

It was on one of these days that Kitty had come to see D'Artagnan, and she had hardly gone away when he went to the Rue Férou.

He found Athos and Aramis philosophizing. Aramis still felt inclined to don the cassock. Athos, according to his wont, said nothing to encourage or to discourage him. He was in favour of freedom of will.

Porthos arrived a moment after D'Artagnan. The four friends were therefore united.

The four faces expressed four different feelings: that of Porthos, tranquillity; that of D'Artagnan, hope; that of Aramis, anxiety; that of Athos, indifference.

At the end of a moment's conversation, during which Porthos hinted that a person in a high position had been good enough to take upon herself the task of extricating him from his embarrassment, Mousqueton entered.

He came to beg Porthos to return to his lodging, where, he said, in a piteous tone, his presence was urgently wanted.

"Is it my mounts?" asked Porthos.

"Yes and no," replied Mousqueton.

"But can you not say?"

"Come, sir."

Porthos rose, bowed to his friends, and followed Mousqueton.

A moment afterward Bazin made his appearance.

"What do you want with me, my friend?" asked Aramis, with that gentleness of speech which was observable whenever his ideas wandered back to the Church.

"A man is waiting to see you, sir, at home."

"A man! What man?"

"A beggar."

"Give him some alms, Bazin, and ask him to pray for the soul of a poor sinner."

"This beggar insists upon seeing you, and asserts that you will be very glad to see him."

"Did he say nothing in particular for me?"

"Yes; he said, 'If M. Aramis hesitates, tell him that I have just arrived from Tours.'"

"From Tours!" exclaimed Aramis. "Gentlemen, a thousand pardons; this man brings me some news that I was expecting."

And he disappeared. Athos and D'Artagnan remained alone.

"I think that those lucky dogs have found their equipments," said Athos. "What did M. de Tréville tell me yesterday; that you visit those shady English people who are protected by the Cardinal?"

"That is to say, an English woman, whom I have already told you of."

"Ah! yes, the fair woman, respecting whom I gave you some advice, which you took good care not to follow."

"I gave you my reasons."

"Yes, you think you will find your equipment there, I believe you said?"

"Not at all; I have learned for certain that this woman had a hand in the kidnapping of Madame Bonacieux."

"Yes, I understand; in order to find one woman again, you pay your addresses to another; it is the longest road, but the most entertaining."

D'Artagnan was on the point of telling Athos everything, but one point stopped him. Athos was a man of the strictest honour, and in the plan directed against Milady, there were certain things to which his puritanical mind would object. Nothing more was said.

But let us follow Aramis.

At the news that a man who had arrived from Tours wished to speak to him, we have seen with what alacrity he had followed Bazin. On reaching his rooms, he found a little man with intelligent eyes, but covered with rags.

"It is you who inquire for me?" asked the musketeer.

"That is to say, I inquire for M. Aramis: are you so called?"

"Myself: you have something to hand to me?"

"Yes, if you show me a certain embroidered handkerchief."

"Here it is," said Aramis, taking it from a little ebony casket.

"That is right," said the mendicant; "send away your lackey."

When Bazin had left the room, the beggar threw a rapid glance round him to see that no one could either see or hear; then, opening his vest and unstitching his doublet, he pulled out a letter.

Aramis uttered a cry of joy at the sight of the seal, kissed the writing, and with almost religious devotion opened the epistle, which ran as follows :

My Friend,

Fate ordains that we should be separated some time longer ; but the happy days of youth are not irretrievably lost. Do your duty in the camp : I do mine elsewhere. Take what the bearer will hand you. Go through the campaign like a gallant gentleman, and think of one who kisses your dark eyes tenderly. Farewell, or rather *au revoir* !

The beggar then drew from his shabby clothes 150 double Spanish pistoles, which he placed on the table. Then he opened the door, bowed, and left before the bewildered young man had time to speak.

Aramis read the letter over again, and noticed that there was a postscript :

P.S.—You can receive the bearer ; he is a count, and a grandee of Spain.

" Golden dreams ! " exclaimed Aramis. " Oh, happy existence ! Yes, we are young ; we shall see happy days again. Oh ! for you, my love, my blood, my life, my all, my beautiful mistress ! "

And he kissed the letter with passion, without looking at the gold which glittered on the table.

Bazin knocked at the door, and on being allowed to enter, remained speechless at the sight of so much gold. He forgot that he came to announce D'Artagnan, who presented himself.

" *Diable !* " he said, " if those are the plums they send you from Tours, I congratulate you on your gardener."

" My dear D'Artagnan," Aramis said, " let us go and find our friends, and since I am rich we will begin by dining together."

" With great pleasure," cried D'Artagnan, " it is long since I had a good dinner, and as I have a somewhat hazardous expedition to make this evening, I shall not be sorry to work up my courage with a few bottles of old Burgundy."

" Let us have the Burgundy, then ; I am partial to it myself," said Aramis, for the sight of the gold had blown away his inclination for the Church.

And having put a few double pistoles in his pocket for the necessities of the moment, he locked the others up in the ebony casket with the handkerchief.

The two friends went to find Athos, who, faithful to his oath not to go out, took upon himself to have the dinner brought to his rooms; as he understood gastronomic details wonderfully well, Aramis and D'Artagnan made no objections.

They were going for Porthos, when they met Mousqueton, who, with a piteous air, was driving a horse and a mule before him.

D'Artagnan uttered a cry of surprise, not unmixed with joy.

"Ah! my yellow nag," he exclaimed. "Look at him, Aramis."

"Oh! the fearful screw!" said Aramis.

"Well, that is the horse upon which I came to Paris."

"He is of a most original colour; the only one I ever saw with such a coat."

"Yes, I sold him for three crowns," said D'Artagnan, "though the carcase is certainly not worth eighteen livres. But how came this animal into the hands of Mousqueton?"

"Ah!" said Mousqueton, "do not mention it, sir; it is a fearful joke on the part of the husband of our duchess."

"How is that, Mousqueton?"

"Yes, we are favourably looked upon by a lady of quality, the Duchess of ——. But, pardon me, my master has ordered me to be discreet; she obliged us to accept by way of souvenir a magnificent Spanish charger and an Andalusian mule. The husband found this out, confiscated the two splendid animals, and substituted these wretched beasts."

"And you are taking them back to him?" said D'Artagnan.

"Just so," replied Mousqueton; "you understand that we cannot accept these in exchange for the animals which were promised."

"No, *pardieu*! though I should have liked to have seen Porthos on my yellow horse—it would have given me some idea of how I looked myself on arriving in Paris. But we must not detain you, Mousqueton. Is your master at home?"

"Yes, sir; but in a very bad humour."

And he went on his road, while the two friends knocked at the door of the unfortunate Porthos, who saw them crossing the court, and took good care not to let them in.

Mousqueton crossed the Pont Neuf, driving his wretched animals before him, and he came to the Rue aux Ours. There, in obedience to the orders of his master, he fastened them to the Procurator's door-knocker, after which, without bothering himself concerning their future fate, he returned home.

At the end of a certain time, the unfortunate beasts, who had

not eaten anything since the morning, made such a noise, raising and letting fall the knocker, that the Procurator ordered his lad to find out to whom the horse and the mule belonged.

Madame Coquenard recognized her presents, and at first could not understand why they were restored to her; but the visit of Porthos soon enlightened her. The rage which shone in his eyes frightened her sensitive heart.

Mousqueton had related how he had met Aramis and D'Artagnan, and how the latter had recognized in the yellow nag the animal on which he had ridden to Paris, and which he had sold for three crowns.

Porthos left after having given Madame Coquenard a rendezvous. The Procurator, seeing him going away, invited him to dinner; an invitation which Porthos haughtily declined.

Madame Coquenard repaired to the meeting-place in fear and trembling, for she guessed the reproaches which awaited her; but she was fascinated by the striking appearance of Porthos.

Everything that a man wounded in his *amour propre* could find in the way of imprecation and reproach Porthos let fall on the head of the unfortunate woman.

"Alas!" she said, "I did it for the best. One of our clients is a horse-dealer; he owed us money, and showed himself recalcitrant. I took the horse and the mule for what he owed us; he promised me two steeds fit for a king."

"Well," said Porthos, "if he owed you more than five crowns he robbed you"; and he turned on his heels as if to go away.

"M. Porthos! M. Porthos!" cried the poor woman, "I see that I was in the wrong, and that I should not have bargained when it was a question of equipping such a cavalier as you."

Porthos, without replying, retreated another step.

Madame Coquenard fancied that she saw him in a radiant cloud, surrounded by duchesses and marchionesses, throwing sacks of gold under his feet.

"Stop, in the name of Heaven!" she cried, "and let us talk."

"To talk to you brings me ill luck," said Porthos.

"But tell me what you require."

"Nothing; for the result would be the same if I asked for something."

The Procurator's wife clung to the arm of Porthos, and in a fit of grief cried:

"M. Porthos, how was I to know? I have no knowledge of horses and equipment!"

"You should have left the matter to me, madame; but you wished to save money, and consequently to lend on usury."

"It is a fault, M. Porthos, which I will repair, on my word of honour."

"And how?" asked the musketeer.

"Listen; this evening M. Coquenard is going to see the Duc de Chaulnes, who has sent for him. The consultation will last at least two hours; come, we shall be all alone, and will settle accounts."

"Very good; now you are talking business, my dear!"

"You forgive me?"

"We shall see," replied Porthos, with majesty.

And the couple separated, saying, "Until this evening."

"*Diable!*" thought Porthos, as he went his way, "it seems that I am at last getting near the chest of Master Coquenard."

CHAPTER XXXIV

AT NIGHT ALL CATS ARE GREY

THE evening, so impatiently awaited by Porthos and by D'Artagnan, came at last.

D'Artagnan, as usual, presented himself about nine o'clock at Milady's. He found her in excellent humour; she had never received him so well. Our Gascon saw at a glance that his note had been delivered, and the effect it created.

Kitty brought in some sherbets; her mistress was most gracious toward her; but, alas! the poor girl was so sad that she took no notice.

At ten o'clock Milady began to get fidgety; D'Artagnan understood; she looked at the clock, rose, reseated herself, and smiled at D'Artagnan, as much as to say, "You are no doubt very amiable, but you would be charming if you would go away."

D'Artagnan rose and took his hat; Milady gave him her hand to kiss; the young man felt that she pressed it, and was aware that it was not through coquetry, but through gratitude for his departure.

"How she loves him!" he murmured, and then he left.

This time Kitty did not wait for him, and D'Artagnan was obliged to find his way alone to the little room. He found her seated there with her head between her hands, crying.

She heard D'Artagnan enter, but she did not raise her head; the young man took her hands, and she burst into sobs.

As he had presumed, Milady, on receiving the letter, had, in a transport of joy, told her servant everything, and as a reward for the way in which she had carried out her mission, had given her a purse of money.

Kitty, on reaching her room, had thrown the purse in a corner, and several pieces of gold had rolled out on the carpet.

The caresses of D'Artagnan caused the poor girl to raise her head.

D'Artagnan was alarmed at her drawn features; she joined her hands with a beseeching look, but without daring to speak.

D'Artagnan, though anything but sensitive, was touched by this mute grief. He was, however, determined to carry out his plan, and he gave Kitty no hope that he would change it; he merely represented his action as a piece of revenge.

This revenge became all the more easy because Milady, no doubt to hide her blushes from her lover, had ordered Kitty to put out all the lights in the apartment. M. de Wardes was to leave before daylight.

She soon heard Milady enter her room. D'Artagnan darted into his cupboard, where he had hardly ensconced himself when the bell rang. Kitty obeyed the summons, closing the door behind her; but the partition was so thin that he could hear nearly all that was said.

Milady appeared to be intoxicated with joy, and made Kitty repeat the most minute details of her pretended interview with M. de Wardes, asking how he had received the letter, what he had replied, and whether he appeared to be in love; to all these questions poor Kitty replied in a choking voice which her mistress failed to notice, so selfish is happiness.

At length, as the hour of her meeting with the Count approached, Milady had all the lights put out, and ordered Kitty to show M. de Wardes in when he presented himself.

Kitty had not long to wait. Scarcely had D'Artagnan made sure by the keyhole that darkness reigned in the apartment than he left his hiding-place.

"What is that noise?" asked Milady.

"It is I," said D'Artagnan, in a low voice; "I, the Comte de Wardes."

"Oh, *mon Dieu*!" murmured Kitty; "he could not even await the hour fixed by himself."

"Well," said Milady, in a trembling voice, "why does he not

come in? Count, Count," she added, "you know that I am waiting for you!"

At this call D'Artagnan gently pushed Kitty aside, and darted into the room.

If rage and pain can inflict torture, it is surely when a lover receives under a false name protestations intended for his rival.

D'Artagnan was in a painful situation which he had not foreseen; his heart was torn by jealousy, and he suffered almost as much as poor Kitty, who was weeping in the next room.

"Yes, Count," said Milady, in the sweetest voice, and pressing his hand tenderly in hers; "yes, the love which your looks and your words have expressed every time we met, have rendered me happy. I also—I love you. Ah, to-morrow I shall ask you for some pledge of your love, to prove that you think of me; and as you might forget me, take this."

And she drew a ring from her finger and gave it to D'Artagnan.

D'Artagnan remembered having seen this ring on Milady's finger; it was a magnificent sapphire surrounded with brilliants.

D'Artagnan's first impulse was to return it; but Milady added:

"No, no; keep that ring, for my sake. Besides, in accepting it, you will render me," she added, in a voice filled with emotion, "a greater service than you can imagine."

"This woman is full of mystery," murmured D'Artagnan to himself.

At this moment he was on the point of revealing everything. He opened his mouth to tell Milady who he was, and with what object he was there; but she added:

"Poor angel, whom that monster of a Gascon nearly killed!"

He was the monster.

"Oh," continued Milady; "do you still suffer from your wounds?"

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, who hardly knew what to say.

"Make your mind easy; I will avenge you," murmured Milady.

"*Peste!*" said D'Artagnan to himself; "the moment for revealing myself has not yet arrived."

It was some time before D'Artagnan could recover himself; but all his thoughts of vengeance had completely departed. This woman exercised a wonderful power over him. He hated and adored her at the same time. He had never believed that two such contradictory feelings could inhabit the same heart, and, in uniting, form a strange and, so to speak, diabolical love.

However, one o'clock had just struck; the time to part had arrived.

D'Artagnan, at the moment of leaving Milady, felt nothing but keen regret; and in a passionate farewell which they addressed to each other, a new meeting was agreed upon for the following week.

Poor Kitty hoped to be able to address a few words to D'Artagnan as he passed through her chamber; but Milady let him out herself in the dark, and left him only on the stair.

The next morning D'Artagnan rushed off to Athos. He was engaged in so singular an adventure that he wished to ask him for his advice. He told him everything, and Athos frowned more than once.

"Your Milady," he said, "seems to be an infamous creature; but you were not the less wrong to deceive her. In one way or another, you will have a terrible enemy on your hands."

While he was speaking, Athos examined with attention the sapphire surrounded with diamonds which had taken the place of the Queen's ring on D'Artagnan's finger.

"You are looking at this ring?" said the Gascon, proud to exhibit so rich a present to his friends.

"Yes," said Athos; "it reminds me of a family jewel."

"It is very fine, is it not?" said D'Artagnan.

"Magnificent!" replied Athos. "I did not believe that there existed two such sapphires. Have you exchanged it for your diamond?"

"No," said D'Artagnan; "it is a present from my lovely English, or rather French, woman; for although I have not asked her, I am sure she was born in France."

"That ring was given to you by Milady?" cried Athos, with great emotion.

"By herself. She gave it to me last night."

"Show it to me," said Athos.

"Here it is," answered D'Artagnan, drawing it from his finger.

Athos examined it and turned very pale; then he tried it on the third finger of his left hand; it fitted this finger as if it had been made for it. A cloud of rage and vengeance passed over his brow, which was generally so calm.

"It is impossible that it can be the same," he said. "How could this ring have come into the hands of Lady Clarick?"

"Do you know that ring?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I thought that I recognized it, but no doubt I was mistaken."

And Athos handed it back to D'Artagnan, but without ceasing to look at it.

" My dear fellow," he said after a moment, " take off that ring, or turn the bezel inside. It recalls cruel memories. But wait ! The sapphire I speak of was damaged by an accident."

D'Artagnan drew the ring from his finger again, and handed it back to Athos.

Athos started.

" Look," he said ; " is it not strange ? "

And he showed him the scratch which he remembered to have existed.

" But from whom did you receive this ring, Athos ? "

" From my mother. It is an old family jewel, as I told you, and was never to have left the family."

" And you—sold it ? " asked D'Artagnan, with hesitation.

" No," replied Athos, with a singular smile ; " I made a present of it during a night of love, as it was given to you."

D'Artagnan remained thoughtful in his turn. He did not replace the ring on his finger, but put it into his pocket.

" Come," said Athos, taking him by the hand ; " you know that I love you as if you were my son. Give up this woman. I do not know her ; but a kind of intuition tells me that she is a lost creature, and that there is something fatal about her."

" You are right," said D'Artagnan ; " I will part from her. I acknowledge that this woman frightens even myself."

" Will you have this courage ? " asked Athos.

" I shall have it," replied D'Artagnan ; " and at once."

" Well, my lad, you are right," said Athos, shaking the hand of the Gascon with almost fatherly affection ; " and God grant that this woman may not leave a terrible trace in your existence."

On returning home, D'Artagnan found Kitty waiting for him.

A month of fever could not have changed the poor child more than that night of sleeplessness and pain. She had been sent by her mistress to the false Comte de Wardes.

Milady was madly in love, and intoxicated with joy. She wished to know when her lover would give her a second night ?

And poor Kitty, pale and trembling, waited for the answer of D'Artagnan.

Athos exercised a great influence over the young man, and the advice of his friend, joined to the misgivings of his own heart, had determined him to see Milady no more.

He took up a pen and wrote the following reply:

Do not count upon me, madame, for an early rendezvous. Since my convalescence I have so many occupations of this kind, that I am obliged to be methodical. When your turn arrives, I shall have the honour to let you know.

I kiss your hands. COMTE DE WARDES

Of the ring, not a word. Did the Gascon wish to keep it as an arm against Milady? or, to put it bluntly, was he not keeping it as a last resource for his equipment?

D'Artagnan handed the letter open to Kitty, who nearly went mad with joy.

She could not believe in so much happiness, and D'Artagnan was forced to renew the assurances implied in the letter.

No matter how hasty the temper of Milady, and the danger of handing her such a note, Kitty started off for the Place Royale as fast as her legs could carry her.

The heart of the best woman is without pity for the pain of a rival.

Milady opened the letter with as much haste as Kitty had displayed in its conveyance; but at the first word she read she became livid; then she crumpled the paper; then she turned with flashing eyes to Kitty.

"What is this letter?" she said.

"It is the answer to that of madame," replied Kitty, trembling.

"Impossible!" cried Milady. "No gentleman would write such a letter to a woman!"

Then suddenly trembling with fear:

"My God!" said she; "can he know——?" and she stopped short.

She ground her teeth and became the colour of ashes. She took a step toward the window, in quest of air; but she could only stretch out her arms; her legs failed her, and she fell into an armchair.

Kitty thought that she had fainted, and sprang forward to open her dress.

But Milady jumped up quickly.

"What do you want?" she said. "And why do you touch me?"

"I thought you had fainted, madame, and wished to help you," replied the servant, alarmed at the terrible expression which the face of her mistress had assumed.

"Faint?—I? Do you take me for a girl? I do not faint when I am insulted; I take revenge, do you hear?"

And she motioned to Kitty to leave the room.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE DREAM OF REVENGE

IN the evening Milady gave orders that D'Artagnan should be introduced as soon as he arrived, according to custom. But he did not come.

The next day Kitty went to see him, and told him what had happened. D'Artagnan smiled. This jealous rage of Milady was his revenge.

In the evening Milady, more impatient than the day before, renewed her order respecting the Gascon; but, like the evening before, she waited in vain.

The next day Kitty again went to see D'Artagnan, but she was no longer as joyful as before.

On D'Artagnan asking her what the matter was, she drew a letter from her pocket and handed it to him.

This letter was in the handwriting of Milady, and was addressed to M. d'Artagnan, not to the Comte de Wardes.

He opened it and read:

DEAR M. D'ARTAGNAN,

It is ill of you thus to neglect your friends, especially at a moment when you are about to leave them for so long. My brother-in-law and myself waited for you yesterday, and the day before, in vain. Will it be the same this evening?

LADY CLARICK

"Quite so; I expected this letter," said D'Artagnan. "My credit rises as that of the Comte de Wardes goes down."

"And shall you go?" asked Kitty.

"Listen, my dear child," said the Gascon, who endeavoured to excuse himself, in his own eyes, for breaking a promise given to Athos; "you understand that it would be bad policy not to accept so positive an invitation. Milady, not seeing me return, would be unable to understand the cessation of my visits, and there is no saying to what lengths a woman of her temper might carry her vengeance."

"Oh!" cried Kitty; "you know how to put things in such

a way, that you are always right. But you are going to court her again, and this time under your own name. It will be far worse than the first time ! "

Instinct led the poor girl to guess a part of what was going to happen.

D'Artagnan tried to reassure her, and promised her to remain insensible to the seductions of Milady.

He sent word that he was very grateful for her kindness, and that he would obey her orders ; he did not dare to write, for fear he might not be able to disguise his hand sufficiently.

At nine o'clock he was at the Place Royale. It was evident that the domestics had been warned, for as soon as D'Artagnan appeared, they announced him.

" Show him in," said Milady, in a voice so shrill that D'Artagnan heard it from the anteroom.

He was introduced.

" I am at home to no one," said Milady ; " you hear, to no one."

The lackey left the room.

D'Artagnan looked at Milady with a curious eye ; she was pale, and her eyes were fatigued by tears or by want of sleep. The light had been reduced, but the young woman could not conceal the traces of the fever which had devoured her for two days.

D'Artagnan approached her with his usual courtesy ; she made a great effort to receive him, but never did a more distorted face belie an amiable smile.

To the questions which D'Artagnan put concerning her health :

" Bad," she replied ; " very bad."

" But then," replied D'Artagnan, " I am indiscreet ; you require rest, and I shall do well to retire."

" Not at all," said Milady ; " on the contrary, remain ; your amiable society will divert me."

" Oh ! " thought D'Artagnan, " she has never been so charming. Let me be on my guard."

Milady assumed the most affectionate air she could take, and gave all the brilliancy possible to her conversation. At the same time the fever, which had abandoned her for the moment, returned, made her eyes sparkle, restored the colour to her cheek, and the red to her lips.

D'Artagnan found once more the Circe who had already caught him in her spell. The love which he thought was extinguished and which was only dormant, was re aroused in his heart.

Milady smiled, and D'Artagnan felt that he would sell his soul for that smile. For a moment he felt something akin to remorse.

By degrees Milady became more communicative. She asked D'Artagnan if he had a mistress.

"Alas!" said D'Artagnan, in the most sentimental tone which he could assume, "how can you be so cruel as to ask such a question? Since I saw you I have breathed and sighed but for you."

Milady smiled a strange smile.

"So you love me?" she asked.

"Need I tell you so, and have you not seen it?"

D'Artagnan eagerly drew his seat closer to that of Milady.

"Let me see; what would you do to prove the love you speak of?"

"Anything you may require of me. Command; I am ready."

Milady remained for a moment wrapped in thought and as if undecided; then, appearing to have made up her mind:

"I have an enemy," she said.

"You, madame!" exclaimed D'Artagnan, feigning surprise. "Can it be possible, lovely and good as you are?"

"A mortal enemy, who has insulted me so cruelly that between us it is war to the death. Can I count upon you as an auxiliary?"

D'Artagnan understood at once the object of the vindictive creature.

"You can, madame," he said grandiloquently; "my arm and my life belong to you, like my love."

"Then," said Milady, "since you are as generous as you are amorous——" she stopped.

"Well?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Well," replied Milady, "from to-day cease talking about impossibilities."

"Do not overwhelm me with happiness," cried D'Artagnan, throwing himself at her knees and covering her hands with kisses.

"Well, deserve this happiness."

"I am at your orders," said D'Artagnan.

"Are you quite sure?" said Milady, with a last doubt.

"Name the infamous man who has made your pretty eyes weep."

"Who told you that I wept?"

"I thought——"

"Women like me do not weep," said Milady.

"So much the better! Come, tell me his name."

"Remember that his name is my whole secret."

"Yet I must know his name."

"Yes, you must; see what confidence I have in you."

"You overwhelm me with joy. He is called——"

"You know him."

"Really! Surely it is not one of my friends?"

"If it was one of your friends, would you hesitate?" cried Milady, her eyes flashing.

"No! were it even my brother!" cried D'Artagnan, as if carried away.

Our Gascon spoke without risk, for he knew what was coming.

"I like your devotion," exclaimed Milady.

"Alas! is that all you love in me?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I love you also," said she, taking his hand.

And the ardent pressure made D'Artagnan quiver, as if by her touch the fever which consumed Milady had been communicated to him.

"You love me, you!" he cried. "Oh, if that were so, it would make me lose my senses."

And he clasped her in his two arms; she did not attempt to withdraw her lips from his kisses, but she did not return them. Her lips were cold, and it seemed to D'Artagnan that he had embraced a statue.

He was none the less intoxicated with joy, electrified with love; he almost believed in the affection of Milady; he half believed in the crime of De Wardes. Had De Wardes been there he would have killed him.

Milady seized the opportunity.

"He is named——" said she in her turn.

"De Wardes. I know it," cried D'Artagnan.

"And how do you know it?" cried Milady, seizing both his hands, and endeavouring to read into his mind.

D'Artagnan felt that he had gone too far, and made a false move.

"Tell me, tell me, then!" repeated Milady. "How do you know?"

"I know it, because yesterday, in a *salon*, De Wardes showed a ring, which he said came from you."

"The wretch!" cried Milady.

The epithet, as one can understand, went to the heart of D'Artagnan.

"Well?" she continued.

"Well, I will revenge you on this wretch."

"Thanks, my gallant friend; and when shall I be avenged?"

"To-morrow—at once, if you wish."

Milady was about to say "at once," but she reflected that such precipitation would be ungracious to D'Artagnan.

Besides, she had a thousand precautions to take, a thousand counsels to give her defender, so that there might be no explanations before witnesses.

"To-morrow," said D'Artagnan, "you shall be avenged, or I shall be dead."

"Which means that you hesitate now?"

"No, I do not hesitate. But would it be just to allow me to go to almost certain death without giving me a little more than hope?"

Milady replied by a glance, which seemed to say, "Is that all? Why don't you speak out?"

Then, accompanying the glance with explanatory words:

"That is only fair," said she tenderly.

"Oh, you are an angel!" said the young man.

"So everything is agreed?" she said.

"Everything but what I ask for, dear soul."

"But when I tell you that you may count on my love?"

"I have no to-morrow to count upon."

"Silence! I hear my brother; he need not find you here."

She rang, and Kitty appeared.

"Go out by that door, and come back at eleven, when we will finish our conversation. Kitty will let you in."

Poor Kitty nearly fainted when she heard these words.

"Well, what are you about," said her mistress, "standing there like a statue?"

"It seems that she always gives her rendezvous for eleven," thought D'Artagnan; "it is a settled custom with her."

Milady held out her hand, which he kissed tenderly.

"Now then," he said, on leaving, hardly replying to the reproaches of Kitty, "I must not play the fool. Decidedly this woman is a regular demon. I must be on my guard."

CHAPTER XXXVI

MILADY'S SECRET

D'ARTAGNAN left the house without seeing Kitty, in spite of her entreaties, and this for two reasons.

First of all, because in this way he would avoid reproaches, recriminations, and prayers; and secondly, because he wished to read his own mind, and, if possible, that of Milady.

What was most clear in this affair was that D'Artagnan was madly in love with Milady, and that she did not love him in the least.

For a moment D'Artagnan considered that the best thing he could do would be to go home and write a letter to Milady, acknowledging that he and De Wardes were the same person, and that, under pain of committing suicide, he could not undertake to kill the Count.

But he also was spurred on by a ferocious desire for revenge; he wished in his turn to possess this woman under his proper name.

He walked five or six times round the Place Royale, turning every ten paces to look at the light in Milady's apartment.

It was evident that she was not in such a hurry as the first time to enter her chamber.

At last the light disappeared.

With this light the last vestige of irresolution was extinguished in the heart of D'Artagnan; he recalled the details of the first night, and with beating heart, and brain on fire, he entered the *hôtel*, and darted into Kitty's chamber.

The young girl, pale as death, and trembling in all her limbs, tried to detain her lover, but Milady, who was on the watch, heard D'Artagnan enter, and opened the door.

"Come," she said.

All this was done with such incredible shamelessness, such monstrous effrontery, that D'Artagnan could hardly believe what he saw and heard.

He none the less flew toward Milady, as iron flies to the magnet.

The door closed behind them. Kitty, on her side, darted to the door.

Jealousy, anger, offended pride, in fact, all the passions which battle in the heart of a loving woman, urged her to betray the truth; but she was lost if she acknowledged that she had aided

in such a machination, and moreover she would lose D'Artagnan.

This last idea impelled her to make yet another sacrifice.

On his side, D'Artagnan had attained the summit of his wishes; he was no longer loved in mistake for a rival; a secret voice did whisper to him that he was only an instrument of vengeance, who was caressed until he could inflict death; but pride, vanity, and madness hushed that voice. Then our Gascon, with that dose of confidence with which we are acquainted, compared himself to De Wardes, and asked himself why, after all, he too should not be loved for himself.

He therefore abandoned himself entirely to the sensations of the moment. Milady was no longer for him that sinister woman, who for a moment had terrified him; she was an ardent and passionate mistress, who abandoned herself entirely to a love which appeared genuine.

We cannot say how long that night lasted for Milady, but D'Artagnan thought that he had been with her hardly two hours when daylight appeared through the Venetian blinds, and gradually spread through the room.

Then Milady, seeing that D'Artagnan was about to leave her, reminded him of his promise.

"I am quite ready," said D'Artagnan; "but first of all, I should like to be certain of one thing."

"Which is that?" asked Milady.

"It is that you love me?"

"It appears to me that I have given you the proof."

"Certainly; but if you love as you say, do you not fear a little for my safety?"

"What can I fear?"

"That I may be dangerously wounded; even killed."

"Impossible," said Milady; "you are so valiant, and such a good swordsman."

"You would not prefer, then, some means for revenging yourself which would render a duel useless?"

Milady looked at her lover in silence; the first rays of the morning light gave her eyes a strange and sinister expression.

"Really, I believe that you are hesitating now," she said.

"No, I do not hesitate; but the fact is that I really pity that poor Comte de Wardes, since you no longer love him; it seems to me that a man must be so cruelly punished by the loss of your love that no other chastisement is needed."

"Who says that I ever loved him?"

"At least I can now believe, without too much fatuity, that you love another person," said the young man in a caressing tone, "and I repeat that I take an interest in the Count."

"You?" asked Milady.

"Yes, I."

"And why?"

"Because I alone know——"

"What?"

"That he is far from having been as guilty toward you as you think."

"How so? Speak then; you are killing me!"

"Oh, reassure yourself, you are not guilty toward me, and I have already forgiven you."

"Go on, go on!"

"De Wardes has nothing to boast about."

"Why? you said yourself that the ring——"

"That ring, my love, it is I who have it. The Comte de Wardes of Thursday last and the D'Artagnan of to-day are the same person."

The imprudent man expected surprise mixed with shame, a slight storm which would end in tears; but he was greatly deceived, and he had not to wait long to find out his mistake.

Pale and terrible, Milady drew herself up, and pushing D'Artagnan away with a violent blow of her elbow, she sprang out of bed.

It was almost broad daylight.

D'Artagnan endeavoured to detain her, to implore her pardon, but she broke away, and in the effort her fine cambric nightdress tore asunder, leaving her shoulders naked; and on one of those lovely white and well-rounded shoulders D'Artagnan, to his inexpressible astonishment, saw the *fleur-de-lis*—that indelible mark imprinted by the hand of the public executioner.

"Good God!" cried D'Artagnan, letting go the nightdress.

And he remained dumb, motionless and frozen on the bed.

Milady felt herself denounced by the terror of D'Artagnan. Without doubt he had seen all; the young man knew her secret, that terrible secret of which every one was ignorant but himself.

She turned upon him, not like an angry woman, but like a wounded panther.

"Ah! wretch!" she cried, "you have betrayed me in the most cowardly way, and, what is more, you know my secret; you shall die."

And running to a casket, which she opened with a feverish hand, she drew out a little dagger with a golden handle, and sprang upon D'Artagnan, who was half naked.

Although the young man was brave, as we know, he was terrified by those distorted features, those horribly dilated pupils, those pale cheeks and bleeding lips; he drew back as if at the approach of a serpent, and his clammy hand touching his sword, he drew it from the sheath.

Without paying any attention to the sword, Milady endeavoured to clamber on to the bed to strike him, and she did not stop until she felt the sharp point at her throat. She then tried to seize the weapon in her hands, but D'Artagnan eluded her grasp; and presenting the point sometimes to her eyes, sometimes to her bosom, slipped out of bed, endeavouring to retreat by the door leading into Kitty's room.

Milady rushed at him in transports of fury, roaring in a blood-curdling manner. The struggle became a duel, and D'Artagnan began to recover himself.

"My lovely woman," he said, "for the love of God calm yourself, or I will mark you with a second *fleur-de-lis* on your pretty cheeks."

"Scoundrel! scoundrel!" howled Milady.

But D'Artagnan, while endeavouring to reach the door, remained on the defensive. At the noise they made, she upsetting the furniture in her efforts to get at him, he sheltering himself behind the furniture by way of protection, Kitty opened the door.

D'Artagnan was close to it; at a single bound he sprang out of Milady's chamber into that of Kitty's, and quick as lightning shut the door, leaning against it with his whole weight while Kitty pushed the bolts.

With strength more than that of a woman, Milady endeavoured to break the door open, and finding that impossible, she riddled it with her dagger, the blade at times piercing through the wood. Each blow was accompanied with a terrible imprecation.

"Quick, quick, Kitty!" said D'Artagnan in a low voice; "let me out of the *hôtel*, or she will have me killed by her lackeys."

"But you cannot go out like that," said Kitty; "you are naked."

"That's true," said D'Artagnan, who only then noticed the fact. "Dress me as you can, but make haste, for it is a question of life and death."

Kitty understood this, and in a moment she threw over him a flowered dress with a large hood and a mantle; she then took him downstairs. It was high time, for Milady had already rung her bell and aroused the whole *hôtel*.

The hall porter pulled the cord at the very moment that Milady, herself half naked, called out by the window:

"Do not open!"

CHAPTER XXXVII

HOW, WITHOUT PUTTING HIMSELF OUT, ATHOS FOUND HIS EQUIPMENT

THE young man fled, while Milady was still threatening him with impotent gestures. As soon as she lost sight of him, Milady fell down in a faint.

D'Artagnan was so upset that, without troubling his head with what would become of Kitty, he rushed through half Paris, and never stopped until he reached the door of Athos. The confused state of his mind, the terror which spurred him on, the shouts of the patrols which pursued him, and the jeers of the passers-by, only made him accelerate his pace.

He crossed the courtyard, ascended the stair, and knocked madly at his friend's door.

Grimaud, his eyes still swollen with sleep, opened, and D'Artagnan sprang in with such force that he nearly knocked him down.

D'Artagnan darted into the chamber of Athos, who shut the door and bolted it, so that they might not be disturbed, and then asked:

"Is the King dead? Have you killed the Cardinal? You are quite upset; what is the matter? I am dying to know."

"Athos," said D'Artagnan, divesting himself of his woman's clothes, "prepare to hear an incredible, unheard-of story."

"Take this dressing-gown first of all," said Athos.

D'Artagnan put it on, mistaking one sleeve for the other in his confusion.

"Well," said Athos.

"Well," replied D'Artagnan, bending down and whispering in the ear of Athos, "Milady is marked with a *fleur-de-lis* on the shoulder."

"Ah!" cried Athos, as if he had received a bullet through the heart.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, "are you quite sure that the *other* is dead?"

"The *other*?" said Athos, in an almost inaudible voice

"Yes; the woman you told me about at Amiens."

Athos groaned, and allowed his head to fall between his hands.

D'Artagnan then related all that had passed: the mad rage of Milady, and her threats of death.

"Upon my soul, my life hangs on a thread," said Athos. "Fortunately, the day after to-morrow we shall leave Paris; in all probability we shall go to La Rochelle, and once started——"

"She will follow you to the end of the world, Athos, if she recognizes you; allow her, then, to exercise her hatred on me alone."

"Ah! my dear friend, what matters it if she kill me? Do you think that I care for life?"

"There is some horrible mystery beneath all this. Athos, this woman is one of the Cardinal's spies, I am sure."

"In that case, take care of yourself. If the Cardinal does not admire you for your London affair, he hates you. If you go out, do not go out alone; if you eat, take precautions—distrust even your shadow."

"Fortunately," said D'Artagnan, "once with the army, I hope that we shall only have men to dread."

"In the meantime," said Athos, "I give up my plans of seclusion and shall go everywhere with you. You must return home, and I will accompany you."

"But I cannot return like this," said D'Artagnan.

"That is true," said Athos, and he rang the bell.

Grimaud entered.

Athos made him a sign to fetch some clothes from D'Artagnan's lodgings; Grimaud answered by another sign, and at once set out.

"But all this had not contributed toward your equipment, my dear fellow," said Athos; "for, if I mistake not, you have left your things at the *hôtel* of Milady, who will hardly return them. Fortunately, you have the sapphire."

"The sapphire is yours, my dear Athos! Did you not tell me that it was a family ring?"

"Yes; my father bought it for two thousand crowns, so he told me once. My mother gave it to me, and, madman that I was, instead of keeping it, I gave it to that creature."

"Then, my dear Athos, take back this ring, which you must value."

"I! take back that ring after it has passed through those infamous hands! Never! that ring is defiled."

"Sell it, then."

"Sell a ring which comes from my mother! I should look upon that as a profanation."

"Pawn it, then; you will obtain at least a thousand crowns on it. As soon as you get money you will release it, and will recover it purified by having passed through the hands of the usurers."

Athos smiled.

At this moment Grimaud returned, accompanied by Planchet, who, uneasy concerning his master, and anxious to know what had happened, had insisted on bringing the clothes himself.

D'Artagnan dressed, and Athos did the same. When they were ready, the latter made a sign to Grimaud as of a man taking aim, and Grimaud at once took down his musket and prepared to follow his master.

They arrived safely at the Rue des Fossoyeurs. Bonacieux was at his door. He looked at D'Artagnan with a bantering air.

"Eh! my dear lodger," he said, "make haste! there is a pretty young girl waiting for you; and ladies, you know, don't like to be kept waiting."

"It is Kitty," cried D'Artagnan, and he rushed upstairs. He was right. On the landing, and crouching against his door, he found the poor girl, trembling all over. As soon as she saw him:

"You promised me your protection; you promised to save me from her rage," she said; "remember that it is you who have brought me to this pass."

"Yes, no doubt," said D'Artagnan; "make your mind easy, Kitty. But what happened after my departure?"

"Do I know?" said Kitty. "At her cries the lackeys arrived; she was mad with rage; she hurled at you every imprecation which exists. Then I thought that she would remember that it was through my room that you had penetrated into hers, and that she would look upon me as an accomplice. I took the little money I had, my most valuable things, and I fled."

"Poor child! but what am I to do with you? I am going away the day after to-morrow."

"Anything you like, sir; help me to leave Paris, to leave France."

"But I cannot take you with me to the siege of La Rochelle."

"No; but you can procure me a place in the country; in Gascony, for example."

"Ah! my dear, in my province the ladies have no ladies'-maids. But I think that I can arrange matters. Planchet, go and fetch Aramis; let him come directly for an important affair."

"I understand," said Athos; "but why not Porthos? it appears to me that his duchess——"

"The Duchess of Porthos is waited on by the clerks of her husband," said D'Artagnan, laughing. "Besides, Kitty would not live in the Rue aux Ours, would you, Kitty?"

"I will live where you like," replied Kitty, "provided that I am well hidden, and that no one can find me."

"Kitty, now that we are about to separate, and that consequently you are no longer jealous of me——"

"Far or near, sir," said Kitty, "I shall always love you."

"Where does not constancy take refuge?" mused Athos.

"I also," said D'Artagnan, "I also shall always love you. But tell me this, and I attach great importance to your answer: Did you never hear of a young woman who was carried away one night?"

"Wait a minute. Oh! goodness, sir, do you love that woman still?"

"No; it is one of my friends who loves her. It is Athos, who is there."

"I?" cried Athos, with the accent of a man about to tread on a serpent.

"No doubt, you," said D'Artagnan, squeezing his hand. "You know the interest we all take in poor Madame Bonacieux. Besides, Kitty will not tell anyone, will you, Kitty? You understand, child, that she is the wife of that ugly clown whom you saw at the door."

"Oh, *mon Dieu*!" cried Kitty; "you remind me of my fear, provided he did not recognize me."

"How recognize you? You have, then, seen this man before?"

"He came twice to see Milady."

"So! At what date?"

"About a fortnight ago. And he returned yesterday evening."

"My dear Athos, we are enveloped in a network of spies. Do you think that he recognized you, Kitty?"

"I lowered my hood when I saw him, but perhaps it was too late."

"Go down, Athos; he distrusts you less than me, and see if he is still at the door."

Athos went down, and returned almost directly.

"He is gone, and the house is closed," said he.

"He has gone to report that all the pigeons are in the dovecot."

"Well, let us fly away," said Athos, "leaving only Planchet behind to bring us news."

"A moment! And Aramis, for whom we have sent!"

At this moment Aramis entered.

The affair was laid before him, and he was told how urgent it was that among his fine acquaintances he should find a place for Kitty.

Aramis reflected an instant, and said, with a blush:

"Will it be really rendering you a service, D'Artagnan?"

"I will be grateful to you all my life."

"Well, Madame de Bois-Tracy asked me to find for one of her friends in the country a trustworthy lady's-maid; and if, my dear D'Artagnan, you can answer for——"

"Oh, sir!" cried Kitty, "be assured that I shall be devoted to the person who will give me the means of leaving Paris."

"Then," said Aramis, "all is for the best"; and he sat down and wrote and sealed a note, which he handed to Kitty.

"Now, my dear," said D'Artagnan, "you know that it is no safer here for us than for you. Therefore we must part. We shall meet again in happier days."

"No matter when or where," said Kitty, "you will find me loving you as I love you to-day."

"A rash oath!" said Athos, while D'Artagnan escorted Kitty to the stairs.

A moment later the three young men separated, to meet again at four o'clock at the house of Athos. They left Planchet behind.

Aramis went home, while Athos and D'Artagnan proceeded to pawn the sapphire.

As our Gascon had anticipated, they easily borrowed three hundred pistoles on the ring, and the Jew said that as it would exactly match some ear-rings, he would purchase it for five hundred pistoles.

Athos and D'Artagnan, with the activity of two soldiers, and the science of two connoisseurs, took hardly three hours in purchasing the full equipment of a musketeer. Athos was very open-handed, and a nobleman to the tips of his fingers. If a thing suited he paid the price asked without bargaining.

He discovered a superb charger, black as jet, rising six years.

He found him without a blemish. He was asked a thousand livres for it, and while D'Artagnan was disputing the price with the dealer, he counted out the money on the table.

Grimaud had a cob which cost three hundred livres.

When Athos had finished his purchases there remained nothing of his hundred and fifty pistoles. D'Artagnan wanted to lend him a portion of his share, but he shrugged his shoulders.

"How much did the Jew say that he would give to purchase the sapphire?" asked Athos.

"Five hundred pistoles."

"That is to say, two hundred pistoles more, a hundred for you and a hundred for me. Why, that would be a fortune! Let us return to the Jew."

"What, you wish——"

"Yes, that ring would recall sad memories; besides, we shall never have three hundred pistoles to redeem it. Go and tell him that the ring is his."

"Reflect, Athos."

"Ready money is dear these times, and one must know how to make sacrifices. Go, D'Artagnan; Grimaud will accompany you with his musket."

Half an hour afterward D'Artagnan returned safe and sound with the money.

It was thus that Athos found within his household resources which he did not expect.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A VISION

AT four o'clock the four friends met at the house of Athos. Their anxiety with regard to their equipment had entirely disappeared.

Suddenly Planchet entered, bearing two letters addressed to D'Artagnan. One was a little note nicely folded, with a pretty green seal, representing a dove with an olive-branch. The other was a large square epistle emblazoned with the terrible arms of his Eminence the Cardinal.

At the sight of the little letter the heart of D'Artagnan leapt, for he thought he recognized the writing; although he had seen it only once, the memory of it had remained engraved in the depths of his heart.

He therefore took up the little note, and eagerly broke the seal. It said :

> Take a walk next Thursday between six and seven, on the road to Chaillot, and carefully examine the carriages which pass ; but if you value your life and that of those who love you, do not say a word, and do not make a movement to lead anyone to imagine that you have recognized her who exposes herself to great risks in order to see you for a moment.

There was no signature.

" It is a trap," said Athos ; " don't go."

" Yes," said D'Artagnan, " I think I know the writing."

" It is imitated," said Athos ; " between six and seven the road to Chaillot is quite deserted ; as well go for a stroll in the forest of Bondy."

" But if we all go," said D'Artagnan, " it will be the devil if they devour four of us ; plus four lackeys ; plus four horses ; plus four arms."

" Besides, it will be an opportunity for showing ourselves off," said Porthos.

" But if it is a woman who writes," said Aramis, " you might compromise her, which would be unseemly on the part of a gentleman."

" We will remain in the background," said Porthos.

" Yes, but a pistol-shot is very soon fired from a carriage going at a gallop."

" Bah ! " said D'Artagnan, " they will miss me ; we will then ride after the carriage and exterminate every one inside. There will always be so many enemies the less."

" He is right," said Porthos ; " besides, we must try our arms."

" Well ! let us give ourselves this pleasure," said Aramis, with his careless air.

" As you like," said Athos.

" Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, " it is half-past four. We have only just time."

" Besides, if we went out too late," said Porthos, " no one would see us, and that would be a pity. Let us get ready then, gentlemen."

" But you have forgotten the second letter," said Athos ; " to judge by the seal, it deserves the trouble of being opened. I think much more of it, D'Artagnan, than of the little note you have just put away against your heart."

D'Artagnan blushed.

"Well," he said, "let us see, gentlemen, what his Eminence says."

He unsealed the letter, and read:

M. D'Artagnan, King's Guard, Company des Essarts, is expected at the Palais Cardinal this evening at eight o'clock.

LA HOUDINIÈRE
Captain of the Guards

"*Diable!*" said Athos; "this is a much more serious appointment than the other."

"I will go to the second after the first," said D'Artagnan; "one is for seven, the other for eight."

"H'm!" said Aramis, "I would not go; a gallant knight cannot fail to keep a rendezvous given by a lady; but a prudent gentleman can excuse himself for not going to see the Cardinal, especially when he has reason to believe that it is not to receive compliments."

"I am of the same opinion as Aramis," said Porthos.

"Gentlemen, I once received a similar invitation to meet his Eminence from M. de Cavois," said D'Artagnan; "I neglected it, and the next day a great misfortune befell me! Constance disappeared. No matter what may happen, I shall go."

"But what of the Bastille?" said Aramis.

"Bah! you will get me out," replied D'Artagnan.

"No doubt," said Aramis and Porthos with admirable coolness; "but in the meantime, as we have to start the day after to-morrow, it would be better not to risk anything."

"Let us do better," said Athos; "let us not leave him during the evening. We will wait each one at a door of the Palais Cardinal with three musketeers behind us, and if we see a closed and suspicious carriage leaving, we shall waylay it. It is long since we had a broil with the guards of the Cardinal, and M. de Tréville must begin to think that we are dead."

"Decidedly, Athos," said Aramis, "you were born a general. What say you to this plan, gentlemen?"

"Admirable!" they exclaimed.

"Well," said Porthos, "I will run to the *hôtel* to warn our comrades to be at the Palais Cardinal at eight o'clock. In the meantime you can get the horses saddled."

"But I have no horse," said D'Artagnan; "I must take one of M. de Tréville's."

"There is no need," said Aramis; "you can have one of mine."

"How many have you?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Three," replied Aramis, smiling. "The third was brought to me this morning by a servant out of livery, who would not tell me whom he belonged to, but who came, he said, on the part of his master——"

"Or of his mistress," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"No matter," said Aramis, blushing. "He was told to place the horse in my stable, without saying whence he came."

"Those things happen only to poets," said Athos gravely.

"Well, then, in that case, which horse will you ride?" asked D'Artagnan.

"The one which has been given to me, undoubtedly."

"The one you have purchased is therefore useless to you. Let me have it for the price you paid."

"I was going to offer it to you, my dear D'Artagnan, giving you the necessary time to return the trifle."

"And how much did it cost?"

"Eight hundred livres."

"Here are forty double pistoles," said D'Artagnan, drawing that sum from his pocket.

"You are rich, then?" said Aramis.

"Very rich, my dear friend"; and D'Artagnan made the other pistoles dance in his pocket.

A quarter of an hour afterward Porthos appeared, riding a very handsome Spanish charger, and followed by Mousqueton on an Auvergne horse. Porthos was sparkling with joy and pride.

At the same time Aramis appeared at the other end of the street on a superb English courser. Bazin followed him on a roan horse, leading a Mecklenburgh steed for D'Artagnan. The two musketeers met at the door; Athos and D'Artagnan looked at them from the window.

"*Diable!*" said Aramis, "you have a splendid horse there, Porthos!"

"Yes; it is the one which should have been sent at first; the husband, by way of a joke, substituted another; but he has been punished since, and I have obtained satisfaction."

Planchet and Grimaud appeared in their turn, holding the chargers of their respective masters. Athos and D'Artagnan came down and got into their saddles. The four started: Athos on the horse which he owed to his wife; Aramis on the horse he owed to his mistress; Porthos on that which came from the

Procurator's wife ; and D'Artagnan on the one which he owed to his good fortune, which is the very best mistress of all.

When the four friends reached the Chaillot road daylight was beginning to fail ; carriages passed in both directions. D'Artagnan, whose friends remained at some distance, carefully examined them all without seeing anyone whom he knew.

At last, after a quarter of an hour, a carriage appeared coming at a gallop from Sèvres ; D'Artagnan had a foreboding that this was the one which enclosed the person who had given the rendezvous. The young man was quite astonished to find his heart beating so violently.

In a moment the head of a woman peered out of the window, two fingers on her mouth as if to enjoin silence, or to blow a kiss. D'Artagnan uttered a little cry of joy—this woman, or rather this vision, for the carriage passed like lightning, was Madame Bonacieux.

By an involuntary movement, and in spite of injunctions, D'Artagnan put spurs to his horse, and overtook the carriage ; but the window had been put up—the vision had disappeared.

D'Artagnan remained fixed to the spot, not knowing what to think. If it were Madame Bonacieux returning to Paris, why this fugitive rendezvous ? If it were not she—which was possible, for there was little daylight, and it was easy to be mistaken—was this not the beginning of a trap, with this woman as a decoy ?

His three comrades rode up. They had all seen the woman's head appear at the window, but none of them, except Athos, knew Madame Bonacieux. The opinion of Athos was that it was Madame Bonacieux ; but, less taken up than D'Artagnan with this pretty face, he thought he had seen the head of a man at the back of the carriage.

" If it is so," said D'Artagnan, " they are no doubt transferring her from one prison to another. But what can they intend to do to this poor woman, and how shall I ever find her again ? "

" My friend," said Athos gravely, " remember that the dead are the only persons we are not likely to meet upon earth. You know something of that as well as I do. Now, if your mistress be not dead, if it was she whom we just saw, you will find her again. And perhaps," he added, with a misanthropical tone, " sooner than you wish."

Half-past seven o'clock struck, and D'Artagnan was reminded by his friends that he had a visit to pay, adding, however, that he might still change his mind.

But D'Artagnan was at the same time obstinate and curious. He had got it into his head that he would go to the Palais Cardinal, and would hear what his Eminence had to say. Nothing could shake this resolution.

On reaching the Palais Cardinal, they found the twelve musketeers who had been convoked waiting for their comrades, who then explained matters.

Athos divided them into three detachments; he took the command of one, gave the command of another to Aramis, and the command of the third to Porthos. Each group then ensconced itself by one of the exits. D'Artagnan, on his side, bravely entered the principal gate.

Although he felt himself powerfully supported, the young man was not without feeling some apprehension as he ascended the staircase. His conduct toward Milady somewhat resembled treason, and he had no doubt as to the political relations existing between that woman and the Cardinal. Then De Wardes, whom he had so badly treated, was one of the faithful partizans of his Eminence, and D'Artagnan knew that if his Eminence was terrible toward his enemies, he was very much attached to his friends.

He handed his letter to the usher on duty, who showed him into the waiting-room, where there were five or six guards of the Cardinal, who looked at him with a peculiar smile.

This smile appeared to D'Artagnan to augur nothing good; only, as it was not easy to intimidate our Gascon, he proudly took up a position in front of the guards, and waited, with his hand on his hip, in an attitude which was not devoid of majesty.

The usher returned and motioned to D'Artagnan to follow him.

It appeared to the young man that as he was leaving, the guards whispered to each other.

He followed a gallery, passed through a large *salon*, entered a library, and found himself face to face with a man who was writing at a desk. The usher showed him in, and retired without saying a word.

D'Artagnan remained standing, and examined this man. He thought at first that he had to do with a judge examining a law-case, but he noticed that the man at the desk was writing, or rather correcting, lines of unequal length, and scanning the words on his fingers; he saw that he was in the presence of a poet.

After a moment, the poet closed his manuscript, on the cover

of which was written *Mirame—Tragedy in Five Acts*, and raised his head.

D'Artagnan recognized the Cardinal.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A TERRIBLE VISION

THE Cardinal placed his elbow on the manuscript, his cheek on his hand, and looked at the young man. No one had a more scrutinizing eye than Cardinal Richelieu, and D'Artagnan felt his glance run through his veins like a fever. However, he remained firm, holding his hat in his hand, and awaiting the good pleasure of his Eminence without too much pride or too much humility.

"Sir," said the Cardinal, "are you a D'Artagnan of Béarn?"

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied the young man.

"There are several branches of the D'Artagnans at Tarbes, to which of them do you belong?" asked the Cardinal.

"I am the son of the man who fought in the Wars of Religion under the great King Henri, the father of his gracious Majesty."

"It is you who left your province some eight months ago to seek your fortune in Paris?"

"Yes, Monseigneur"

"You came by Meung, where something happened to you. I hardly remember what, but something."

"Monseigneur, this is what happened to me——"

"Never mind," said the Cardinal, with a smile which indicated that he knew all about it. "You were recommended to M. de Tréville?"

"Yes, but in that unfortunate affair at Meung——"

"The letter was lost," interrupted the Cardinal: "yes, I know that; but M. de Tréville is a clever physiognomist, who judges men at first sight, and he placed you in the company of his brother-in-law, M. des Essarts, allowing you to hope that you would one day enter the Musketeers."

"Monseigneur is correctly informed."

"Since then several things have happened; you took a stroll behind the Chartreux; then you went on a journey with your friends to the waters of Forges; they remained on the road, but you continued your way, for of course you had business in England."

"Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, somewhat abashed, "I went——"

"To fly the hawk at Windsor. That is nobody's business but your own. I know it, because it is my business to know everything. On your return you were received by an august person, and I see with pleasure that you have preserved the souvenir she gave you. The next day you received the visit of De Cavois, who begged you to call at the Palace; you did not come, and you were wrong."

"Monseigneur, I feared that I had incurred the anger of your Eminence."

"And why, sir? You had followed the instructions of your superiors with more intelligence and courage than another would have done; incur my anger, when you deserved praise! The people I punish are those who do not obey, and not those who, like you, obey—too well. And here is the proof: recall to your mind the day upon which I sent for you, and try to remember what happened the same evening."

It was on that evening that Madame Bonacieux had been carried off. D'Artagnan shuddered; he remembered that only half an hour before he had seen the poor woman, no doubt carried away by the same power which had caused her to disappear.

"At last," said the Cardinal, "as I had heard nothing about you for some time, I determined to know what you were doing. Besides, you owe me some little gratitude. You must have noticed yourself how tenderly you have been dealt with under the circumstances."

D'Artagnan bowed with respect.

"This has been due to a scheme of mine which I wished to lay before you on the day when you received my first invitation, but you did not come. Happily, nothing has been lost by this delay, and to-day you shall hear it. Sit down in front of me, M. d'Artagnan. You are a gentleman of good enough descent not to be kept standing."

And the Cardinal pointed to a chair; but the young man was so astonished that he waited for a second sign before obeying.

"You are brave, M. d'Artagnan," said his Eminence; "you are prudent, which is even better. I like men of head and of heart. Do not be afraid," he said, smiling; "by men of heart I mean men of courage. But, young as you are, and just entering on life, you have powerful enemies. If you do not take care they will ruin you!"

" Alas ! Monseigneur, they will find it easy, no doubt, for they are strong and well supported, whereas I am alone."

" Yes, that is true ; but, even alone, you have already done a great deal, and I have no doubt but you will do more. However, I think that you require to be guided in your adventurous career ; for, if I am not mistaken, you came to Paris to make your fortune."

" I am in the age of extravagant hopes, Monseigneur."

" Hopes are only extravagant for fools, sir, and you are a man of sense. Let us see ; what would you think of a commission in my Guards, and of a company after the campaign ? "

" Ah, Monseigneur ! "

" You accept, do you not ? "

" Monseigneur ! " said D'Artagnan, in an embarrassed air.

" What ! You refuse ? " exclaimed the Cardinal, with astonishment.

" I am in the Guards of his Majesty, Monseigneur, and I have no reason to be dissatisfied."

" But it appears to me that my Guards are also the Guards of his Majesty, and that provided that one serves in a French corps, one serves the King."

" Monseigneur, your Eminence has misunderstood my words."

" You wish for a pretext, do you not ? I understand. Well, this pretext, you have it. The promotion, the campaign about to open, the opportunity which I offer you, will justify you in the eyes of the world. Then again, you need protection ; for you must know, M. d'Artagnan, that I have received serious complaints against you ; you do not devote your days and nights exclusively to the service of the King."

D'Artagnan flushed.

" Yes," said the Cardinal, laying his hand on a bundle of papers, " I have there numerous reports concerning you ; but before reading them, I wished to talk with you. I know you to be a man of resolution, and your services, well directed, instead of leading you to ruin, might be very profitable. Come, reflect and decide."

" Your kindness overwhelms me, Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan ; " and I recognize in your Eminence a greatness of soul compared with which I feel as a worm. But since you permit me to speak openly——"

D'Artagnan stopped.

" Yes, speak."

" Well, I will tell your Eminence that all my friends are in the

Musketeers, or the Guards of the King; and that my enemies, by some inconceivable fatality, are all retainers of your Eminence. I should therefore be ill-received here, and ill-thought of there, were I to accept your offer, Monseigneur."

"Can you have the arrogance to suppose that I do not offer you as much as you are worth, sir?" said the Cardinal, with a smile of disdain.

"Monseigneur, your Eminence is a hundred times too good to me, and I think, on the contrary, that I have not done enough to be worthy of your goodness. The siege of La Rochelle is about to begin. I shall serve under the eyes of your Eminence, and should I do anything to attract your attention—well, I shall have at least performed some gallant action to justify the protection with which you would honour me. Later, Monseigneur, I shall, perhaps, have the right to give myself away, but at present I should have the appearance of selling myself."

"That means that you refuse to serve me, sir," said the Cardinal, with a tone of annoyance not unmixed with esteem. "Remain free, then, and keep your hatreds and your sympathies."

"Monseigneur——"

"Say no more. I bear you no ill-feeling, but you understand that one has enough to do to defend one's friends and to reward them, without thinking of one's enemies; and yet I will give you a piece of advice. Take heed, for from the moment that I withdraw my hand I would not value your life at a farthing."

"I will do my best," said D'Artagnan, with a noble assurance.

"You will remember later, if any misfortune befalls you," said Richelieu with emphasis, "that it was I who sought you, and that I did all I could to prevent such misfortune."

"I shall, no matter what happens," said D'Artagnan, placing his hand on his chest and bowing, "be eternally grateful to your Eminence for what you do for me at this moment."

"Well, then, as you said, M. d'Artagnan, we will see each other again after the campaign. I shall follow you with my eyes, for I shall be there," went on the Cardinal, pointing to a magnificent suit of armour, "and on our return we will square our accounts."

"Ah, Monseigneur, spare me the weight of your displeasure! Remain neutral, Monseigneur, if you find that I am acting like an honest man."

"Young man," said Richelieu, "if I can say to you once more what I have said to you to-day, I promise you to say it."

This last word of Richelieu's conveyed a terrible doubt. It

alarmed D'Artagnan more than a threat would have done, for it was a warning. The Cardinal evidently wished to preserve him from some impending danger. He opened his mouth to answer, but the Cardinal, with a haughty gesture, dismissed him.

D'Artagnan left the room, but at the door his heart almost failed him, and he nearly went back. However, the grave and severe face of Athos appeared before his mind. If he concluded such a pact with the Cardinal as that which had been proposed, Athos would not give him his hand—Athos would deny him.

It was this fear which restrained him ; so powerful is the influence of a truly noble character on all around him.

D'Artagnan descended the same stair by which he had entered, and found Athos and his four musketeers in front of the gate. They were beginning to feel uneasy.

A word from D'Artagnan reassured them, and Planchet ran to inform the other posts that it was needless to mount guard any longer, as his master had left the Palais Cardinal safe and sound.

On returning to the house of Athos, Aramis and Porthos asked the cause of this strange rendezvous, and D'Artagnan simply told them that the Cardinal had sent for him to propose that he should enter his Guards with the rank of ensign, which he had refused to do.

" And you did right," cried Aramis and Porthos in one voice.

Athos fell into a profound reverie, and said nothing ; but when they were alone :

" You did what you ought to have done, D'Artagnan," said Athos ; " but perhaps you have done wrong."

D'Artagnan heaved a sigh, for this voice responded to a secret voice which told him that great misfortunes were in store for him.

The next day was passed in preparations for departure. D'Artagnan went to take leave of M. de Tréville.

It was believed that the separation of the Guards and the Musketeers would be only momentary, the King holding his Parliament that day and proposing to start the next. M. de Tréville therefore merely asked D'Artagnan if he could be of service to him ; but D'Artagnan answered proudly that he had all that he required.

The next day, at the first sound of the trumpet, the friends parted ; the Musketeers marched to the *hôtel* of M. de Tréville, and the Guards to that of M. des Essarts. Then each of the Captains led his men to the Louvre, where they paraded before the King.

The King was sad, and looked ill, which detracted from his noble appearance. The day before, he had been attacked with fever in the middle of a sitting of Parliament, and while holding a Bed of justice.

He had nevertheless made up his mind to start that evening, and, in spite of all observation, he had decided to review the troops, hoping by an act of vigour to conquer the disease which was beginning to lay hold of him.

The review finished, the Guards alone marched, as the Musketeers were to go with the King. This afforded Porthos an opportunity of going to show himself off in the Rue aux Ours in his superb equipment.

On his side, Aramis wrote a long letter. To whom? No one knew.

In the adjoining room Kitty, who was going to start that evening for Tours, was waiting.

Athos sipped his last bottle of Spanish wine.

During this time D'Artagnan rode forth with his company. On reaching the Faubourg Saint-Antoine he turned gaily round to look at the Bastille. But as it was the Bastille alone that he looked at, he did not see Milady, who, mounted on a chestnut horse, pointed him out to two ill-favoured individuals, who immediately approached the ranks to take a good look at him.

Interrogated by a glance, Milady made a sign that it was the right person. Then, certain that there could be no mistake in the execution of her orders, she spurred her horse and disappeared.

The two men followed the company, and on leaving the Faubourg mounted horses which a servant without livery was holding for them.

CHAPTER XL

THE SIEGE OF LA ROCHELLE

THE siege of La Rochelle was one of the great political events of the reign of Louis XIII, and one of the great military enterprises of the Cardinal.

The political intentions of the Cardinal when he undertook this siege were far-reaching. Of the important towns given by Henri IV to the Huguenots as places of refuge, there remained only La Rochelle. It was urgent, therefore, to destroy this last bulwark of Calvinism, where civil discord and foreign wars were being incessantly fomented.

Discontented Englishmen, Spaniards, Italians, adventurers of all nations, soldiers of fortune of all sects, were constantly answering the call to join the Protestant standard, and organized a vast association whose branches reached every point of Europe.

La Rochelle, which had acquired fresh importance from the ruin of the other Calvinist towns, was therefore a centre of dissension. In addition to this, its port was the last door in the kingdom left open to the English. In closing it against England, the Cardinal completed the work of Joan of Arc and of the Duc de Guise.

But alongside of these matters, which belong to history, the chronicler is forced to notice the petty motives of the man in love and the jealous rival.

Richelieu, as every one knows, had been in love with the Queen; had this love a simple political aim, or was it one of those deep passions such as Anne of Austria inspired in those who surrounded her? We cannot say; but at all events we have seen how Buckingham had supplanted him. For Richelieu, therefore, it was a matter not only of ridding France of an enemy, but of revenging himself on a rival; and the vengeance must be great and crushing, worthy of a man who held in his hand all the forces of the kingdom.

Richelieu knew that in fighting England he was fighting Buckingham, and that in triumphing over England he would triumph over Buckingham; and lastly, that in humiliating England in the eyes of Europe he would humiliate Buckingham in the eyes of the Queen.

On his side, Buckingham, while putting forward the honour of England, was moved by feelings absolutely similar to those of the Cardinal. Buckingham also had his private revenge to pursue. He had been unable to return to France as ambassador; he was determined to return as a conqueror.

The real stake in the game which two powerful kingdoms were playing for the good pleasure of two enamoured men, was simply a look from Anne of Austria.

The first advantage had been won by the Duke of Buckingham, who had surprised the Comte de Toirac in the Isle of Ré, and effected a landing after a sanguinary struggle.

The Comte de Toirac retired into the citadel of Saint-Martin with his garrison, and threw a hundred men into the little fort of La Prée.

This event had hastened the resolutions of the Cardinal, and while waiting until the King and himself could take the command

of the siege, he had directed Monsieur, the King's brother, to commence operations, and had hurried to the theatre of war all the troops of which he could dispose.

Our friend D'Artagnan formed part of this force.

The King, as we have said, was to follow after holding his Bed of justice; but on rising from his Bed of justice on the twenty-third of June he had been seized with fever; he had, nevertheless, wished to start; but, growing worse, had been obliged to stop at Villeroi.

Where the King remained the Musketeers remained, and the result was that D'Artagnan was separated from his good friends, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

He arrived none the less without accident at the camp before La Rochelle about the 10th September, 1627. Everything was in the same state.

The Duke of Buckingham and the English, masters of the Isle of Ré, continued to besiege, but without success, the citadel of Saint-Martin and the fort of La Prée. The hostilities at La Rochelle had begun some days before, round a fort which the Duc d'Angoulême had constructed near the town.

The Guards, under M. des Essarts, were quartered at the Minimes convent.

But we know that D'Artagnan, whose ambition it was to join the Musketeers, had made few friends among his comrades; he therefore found himself isolated, and left to his own reflections, which were not pleasant.

While indulging in these reflections, D'Artagnan was strolling along a pretty little road leading from the camp to the village of Angoutin. It was getting dark, when in the last rays of the setting sun he thought he could discern, behind a hedge, the glitter of a musket-barrel. He stopped: on the other side of the road a second musket protruded from behind a rock. It was evidently an ambush. The young man saw with a certain uneasiness that the first musket was being lowered in his direction; he instantly threw himself on the ground; at the same moment a shot was fired and a bullet whistled over his head.

There was no time to be lost; D'Artagnan sprang up, and a bullet from the other musket sent the stones of the road flying at the spot where he had thrown himself down.

D'Artagnan was not one of those men who show useless bravery in courting death, so that people may say that they did not yield an inch; besides, it was not a question of courage here; D'Artagnan had fallen into an ambush.

"If there is a third shot," he said to himself, "I am a dead man."

And immediately he ran away as fast as he could in the direction of the camp; but, no matter how rapid his flight, the first man who had fired had time to reload and to fire a second shot, which was so well aimed that the bullet went through his hat and sent it flying ten paces in front of him.

As D'Artagnan had no other hat, he picked up his own while running along. On reaching his quarters, breathless and pale, he sat down without saying anything, and began to reflect.

This incident might have three causes:

The first and most natural was that he had been ambushed by men from La Rochelle, who would not have been sorry to have killed one of his Majesty's Guards.

D'Artagnan took up his hat, examined the hole made by the bullet, and shook his head. The bullet had been fired, not from a musket, but from an arquebuse. The accuracy of the shot had already made him think that it had been fired from a private weapon: it was therefore not a military ambush.

It might be a souvenir of the Cardinal. But D'Artagnan shook his head. His Eminence would hardly resort to such means toward people who were within his reach.

It might be a piece of vengeance on the part of Milady.

This was much more probable.

He endeavoured in vain to recall the features or the costume of the assassins. He had made off in such a hurry that he had not had leisure to observe them.

"Ah, my poor friends!" murmured D'Artagnan, "where are you? and how much I stand in need of you!"

D'Artagnan passed a very bad night. Three or four times he jumped in his sleep, thinking that a man was approaching to stab him. However, day broke without any incident having occurred. But D'Artagnan felt convinced that what was put off was not lost. The next day he did not leave his quarters, giving as an excuse to himself that the weather was bad.

At nine o'clock the next morning the drums beat to arms. The Duc d'Orleans was going to inspect the posts. The Guards fell in, and D'Artagnan took his place in the ranks.

Monsieur passed along the front of the line; then the field officers rode up to wait on him, and with them M. des Essarts. After a few moments Monsieur raised his voice and said:

"I want three or four volunteers, led by a steady man, for this service."

" As to the steady man, I have him here, Monseigneur," said M. des Essarts, pointing to D'Artagnan, " and as for volunteers, Monseigneur has only to make known his wishes to have as many as he wants."

" Four volunteers to come and die with me ! " said D'Artagnan, raising his sword.

Four men, two guards and two soldiers, stepped forward, and D'Artagnan refused all other offers in their favour.

It was not known whether, after the capture of the bastion the Rochelais had evacuated it, or left a garrison ; it was therefore necessary to examine the spot at close quarters to make sure.

D'Artagnan set out with his four companions and followed the trenches ; in this way they arrived within a hundred paces of the bastion. Then D'Artagnan noticed that the two soldiers who were bringing up the rear had disappeared. He thought that, being afraid, they had remained behind.

At the turning of the counterscarp they found themselves at about sixty paces from the bastion. There was no one to be seen, and the bastion seemed deserted.

The three remaining men were deliberating whether they should advance further, when suddenly a girdle of smoke surrounded the stone giant, and a dozen bullets came whistling round D'Artagnan and his comrades.

They knew what they wished to know ; the bastion was guarded. It would have been a useless piece of imprudence to have remained any longer in so dangerous a spot ; D'Artagnan and the two guards retreated as hastily as possible.

On reaching the angle of the trench which would serve them as a rampart, one of the guards fell ; a bullet had pierced his chest. The other guard, who was safe and sound, continued moving in the direction of the camp.

D'Artagnan, not wishing to abandon his companion, bent forward to raise him, but at this moment two shots were fired ; one bullet smashed the head of the wounded man, and the other flattened itself against the rock after passing within two inches of D'Artagnan.

The young man turned round sharply, for this attack could not have come from the bastion, which was masked by the angle of the trench ; it occurred to him that the two soldiers who had abandoned him were the assassins of two evenings before ; he resolved to elucidate this matter, and he fell on the body of his comrade as if he had been killed.

He instantly saw two heads rise above an abandoned work

thirty paces away; they were those of our two soldiers. D'Artagnan was not mistaken; these men had followed him in order to murder him, hoping that his death would be placed to the account of the enemy. However, as he might be only wounded and denounce their crime, they approached to finish him; fortunately, deceived by the stratagem of D'Artagnan, they neglected to reload their guns.

When they were at ten paces from him, D'Artagnan, who, in falling, had taken good care not to lose hold of his sword, suddenly rose and sprang upon them.

The assassins realized that if they fled in the direction of the camp, without having killed their man, they would be accused by him; therefore their first idea was to pass over to the enemy. One of them took his gun by the barrel and used it as a club; he dealt a terrible blow at D'Artagnan, who avoided it by throwing himself on one side; but by this movement he left a passage free for the bandit, who darted away in the direction of the bastion. As the Rochelais who guarded it were not aware why he ran toward them they opened fire, and he fell, struck by a bullet which smashed his shoulder.

Meanwhile D'Artagnan fell upon the second soldier, attacking him with his sword; the struggle was short; the wretch had nothing to defend himself with but his discharged arquebuse, and the sword of the guard, gliding down the barrel, passed through the thigh of the assassin, who fell.

D'Artagnan put the point of his weapon to his throat.

"Oh! do not kill me," cried the bandit; "pity, pity, my officer, and I will tell you all!"

"Wretch!" said D'Artagnan, "speak quick; who ordered you to murder me?"

"A woman whom I do not know, but who is called Milady."

"But if you do not know this woman, how do you know her name?"

"My comrade knew her, and called her thus; she dealt with him, and not with me; he has even in his pocket a letter from her, which, as I understood him, is of great importance to you."

"But how came you to go shares in this ambush?"

"He proposed that we should undertake the job between us, and I accepted."

"And how much did she pay you for this fine exploit?"

"One hundred louis."

"Well," said the young man, laughing, "she considers me worth something; for such wretches as you a sum like that was

a fortune; I can understand that you accepted it, and I will spare your life—on one condition."

"Which?" asked the soldier anxiously.

"That you go and fetch the letter which your comrade has in his pocket."

"But," cried the bandit, "that is another way of killing me; how can I go in search of that letter under the fire of the bastion?"

"You must make up your mind to fetch it, or I swear that you shall die by my hand."

And at these words D'Artagnan made so threatening a gesture that the wounded man got up.

"Stop! stop!" he cried, becoming brave through terror; "I will go, I will go."

D'Artagnan took the soldier's arquebuse, and making him march before him, he pushed him in the direction of his companion, pricking him with the point of his sword.

It was a fearful thing to see this wretch, leaving a long trace of blood behind him, livid at the thought of death, endeavouring to drag himself along, without being seen, to the body of his accomplice.

Terror was so deeply imprinted on his face, bathed with a cold perspiration, that D'Artagnan had pity on him; looking at him with contempt, he said:

"Well, I shall show you the difference between a man of courage and a coward like you. Remain here; I will go."

And with an active step, carefully observing the movements of the enemy, and taking advantage of the unevenness of the ground, D'Artagnan managed to reach the second soldier.

There were two means of accomplishing his end; search him where he was, or carry him off, making a shield of his body.

D'Artagnan preferred the second method, and took the assassin on his shoulders just as the enemy opened fire.

A slight shudder, the dead sound of three bullets which riddled his flesh, and a last cry, proved to D'Artagnan that the wretch who had wished to assassinate him had just saved his life.

D'Artagnan regained the trench, and flung the corpse alongside of the wounded man, who was as pale as death.

He then commenced his search; a leather pocket-book, a purse, in which, no doubt, was his share of the blood-money, a dice-box and dice, formed the inheritance of the dead man.

He left the dice-box and dice where they had fallen, threw the purse to the wounded man, and eagerly opened the pocket-book.

Among some papers without importance, he found the following letter, which was the one he had risked his life to obtain :

> Since you have lost trace of this woman, and that she is now safely lodged in a convent, which you ought never to have allowed her to enter, endeavour at least not to miss the man. If you do, you know that my arm is long, and that you will pay dearly for the hundred louis which you have received.

There was no signature, but it was evident that the letter came from Milady. He consequently kept it as a piece of evidence, and, sheltered behind the angle of the trench, he began to question the wounded man.

The latter admitted that, in company with his comrade who had just been killed, he had been engaged to carry off a young woman, who was to leave Paris by the gate of La Villette, but that having stopped to drink at a wineshop, they had missed the carriage by ten minutes.

" But what would you have done with this woman ? " asked D'Artagnan, with a feeling of anguish.

" We were to take her to a house in the Place Royale."

" Yes, yes ; to the house of Milady herself."

Then the young man, shuddering, understood how terrible was this woman's thirst for revenge, and how well acquainted she was with the affairs of the Court. No doubt she received her information from the Cardinal.

But in the midst of all this he understood with a feeling of joy that the Queen had ended by discovering the prison where the poor little Madame Bonacieux was expiating her devotion, and that she had delivered her from it. The letter which he had received from the young woman was explained.

Henceforward, as Athos had predicted, it would be possible to find Madame Bonacieux, and a convent was not impregnable.

This idea made him feel merciful. He turned toward the wounded man, who followed with uneasiness the various expressions of his face, and offering him an arm, said :

" Come, I will not abandon you like that. Lean upon me, and we will return to the camp."

" Yes," said the wounded man, who could hardly believe in such magnanimity ; " but is it to have me hung ? "

" You have my word of honour, and for the second time I spare your life."

The wounded man went down on his knees and kissed the feet of his preserver ; but D'Artagnan, who had no interest in

remaining so near to the enemy, cut short these symptoms of gratitude.

The guard who had returned after the first discharge, had announced the death of his four companions.

It was therefore with astonishment and joy that the regiment saw their young comrade come back safe and sound.

D'Artagnan explained the sword-wound of his companion by a sortie, which he invented. He related the death of the other soldier, and the dangers they had run. This story procured him a regular triumph. The whole army spoke of the affair for an entire day, and Monsieur sent him his congratulations.

Besides, as every good action brings its own reward, that of D'Artagnan restored the tranquillity he had lost. He thought that he might be easy in his mind, since one of his enemies was killed and the other was devoted to his interests.

This tranquillity proved one thing, which was that D'Artagnan was not yet thoroughly acquainted with Milady.

CHAPTER XLI

THE ANJOU WINE

AFTER very bad news had been received concerning the King, the report of his convalescence began to spread through the camp, and as he was very anxious to arrive at La Rochelle, it was said that he would resume his journey as soon as he could get on horseback.

D'Artagnan, as we have said, had grown easier in his mind, as always happens after a danger is past; he was, however, very anxious about his friends.

But one morning in the beginning of November all was explained in this letter, dated from Villeroi:

M. D'ARTAGNAN,

MM. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, after having caroused at my house, and greatly amused themselves, made so much noise that the Provost Marshal, a very severe man, confined them to quarters for several days; but I accomplish their orders in sending you twelve bottles of my Anjou wine, which they found very good. They desire that you should drink their health in their favourite wine.

Your most humble and most obedient servant,

GODEAU

Purveyor to the Musketeers

"That is some satisfaction," exclaimed D'Artagnan: "they think of me in their pleasures, and I of them in my troubles. I shall of course drink to their health, but not alone."

And D'Artagnan ran off to fetch two guards, to invite them to come and partake of his Anjou wine; one of the guards had an engagement for the same evening, and the other for the next day, so that the meeting was put off until two days later.

D'Artagnan, on returning to his quarters, sent his wine to the canteen of the Guards, with directions that the greatest care should be taken of it; then, on the day appointed for the solemnity, as the dinner-hour was fixed for noon, D'Artagnan sent Planchet at nine to prepare everything.

Planchet, proud of being raised to the dignity of *maître d'hôtel*, set to work with intelligence to arrange everything; he called in the aid of the valet of one of the guests, named Fourreau, and the false soldier who had tried to murder D'Artagnan, and who, not being attached to any corps, had entered his service, or rather that of Planchet, since D'Artagnan had saved his life.

The hour of the feast having struck, the two guests arrived, and took their places at table.

Planchet waited with his napkin under his arm. Fourreau uncorked the bottles, and Brisemont, for such was the name of the convalescent, decanted the wine, which had been shaken on the road. Of this wine the first bottle was thick toward the bottom; Brisemont poured the lees into a glass, and D'Artagnan allowed him to drink this, for the poor devil had not yet recovered his strength.

The guests, after their soup, were going to carry the first glass to their lips, when a gun was fired from Fort Louis, and another from Fort Neuf; immediately the guards, who thought that a sudden attack had been made by the besieged garrison, or by the English, sprang upon their swords, D'Artagnan did the same, and all three rushed to their posts.

But they had hardly left the canteen, when they were informed of the reason of this noise.

Shouts of "*Vive le Roi!*" "*Vive M. le Cardinal!*" re-echoed on all sides, and the drums were beating in every direction.

The King, impatient, as we have said, had made two forced marches, and had just arrived with his household and a reinforcement of ten thousand men; he was preceded and followed by his Musketeers.

D'Artagnan, placed in line with his company, saluted with signs

of delight his friends, who kept their eyes on him, and M. de Tréville, who recognized him at once.

The ceremony over, the four friends were soon in each other's arms.

"*Pardieu!*" cried D'Artagnan, "you could not have arrived at a more propitious moment, and the viands have hardly had time to get cold! Is it not so, gentlemen?" added the young man, turning toward the two guards, and presenting them to his friends.

"Ah! it appears that we were banqueting, then," said Porthos.

"I hope," said Aramis, "that there are no ladies at your dinner."

"Have you got any drinkable wine in your hut?" asked Athos.

"*Pardieu!* there is yours, my dear fellow," replied D'Artagnan.

"Our wine?" exclaimed Athos, astonished.

"It is the wine sent to me on your behalf."

"On our behalf!" exclaimed the three musketeers.

"If it was not you, it was your purveyor," said D'Artagnan.

"Our purveyor?"

"Yes; Godeau, purveyor to the Musketeers."

"No matter where it comes from," said Porthos; "let us taste it, and, if it be good, let us drink it."

"No," said Athos, "we must not drink wine which comes from an unknown source."

"You are right, Athos," said D'Artagnan. "So none of you ordered the innkeeper, Godeau, to send me the wine?"

"No; and yet he sent it in our name?"

"Here is his letter!" said D'Artagnan, showing it to his friends.

"It is not his handwriting," said Athos. "I know it, having settled accounts with him."

"It is a forgery," said Porthos, "we were not confined to barracks!"

"D'Artagnan," said Aramis, in a tone of reproach, "how could you believe that we had created a disturbance?"

D'Artagnan grew pale, and a convulsive trembling shook all his limbs.

"You alarm me," said Athos. "What has happened?"

"Quick, quick, my friends!" cried D'Artagnan; "a horrible suspicion has flashed across my mind! Can it be another piece of revenge on the part of that woman?"

Athos grew pale in his turn.

D'Artagnan darted toward the canteen, the three musketeers and the two guards following him.

The first object which D'Artagnan saw was Brisemont, stretched on the ground, and writhing in fearful convulsions.

Planchet and Fourreau, pale as death, were trying to help him, but it was evident that all aid was useless; the features of the dying man were already distorted by the approach of death.

"Oh, my friends!" said D'Artagnan, "once more you have saved my life; and not only mine, but that of these gentlemen." Then addressing the guards, he asked them to say nothing about this adventure.

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, addressing the guards, "you understand that a feast after what has just passed would be somewhat dull. I hope you will accept my apologies, and allow me to put it off till another day."

The two guards courteously accepted D'Artagnan's apologies and withdrew, understanding that the four friends would like to remain alone.

When D'Artagnan and the three musketeers were without witnesses, they looked at each other, as men who understood the gravity of the situation.

"First of all," said Athos, "let us leave this room; a man who has died a violent death is poor company."

And the four friends went out, leaving to Planchet and Fourreau the duty of burying Brisemont.

In a few words, Porthos and Aramis were made acquainted with the situation.

"Well," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "as you see, it is war to the death."

Athos nodded.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I see that; but do you think it is she?"

"Athos, it is your wife, I tell you," repeated D'Artagnan. "Do you not remember how your description exactly fitted her?"

"Yet, I thought that she was dead; I hanged her so carefully."

D'Artagnan shook his head in his turn.

"But what must be done?" asked the young man.

"Listen; try to find her and to have an explanation; say to her: Peace or war? On my word of honour, I will never say or do anything against you: on your side, you will take a solemn

oath to remain neutral as regards me; if not, I will go to the Chancellor, I will go to the King, I will go to the public executioner, I will denounce you as branded, I will have you tried, and if you are acquitted I will kill you as I would kill a mad dog."

"I like that proposal," said D'Artagnan; "but how am I to find her?"

"Time, my dear friend, will furnish you with an opportunity—opportunity is like a game of chance; the more one stakes the more one wins, when one knows how to wait."

"Yes; but to wait surrounded by assassins and poisoners——"

"Bah!" said Athos; "God has protected us up to the present; God will protect us still."

"Yes, us; besides, we are men, and after all, it is our trade to risk our lives; but she," added D'Artagnan, under his breath.

"What she?" asked Athos.

"Constance."

"Madame Bonacieux. Ah, that is true!" said Athos; "my poor friend, I forgot that you were in love."

"Well," said Aramis, "but did you not learn by the letter which you found on that dead wretch that she was in a convent?"

"Yes."

"Well, as soon as the siege is over we will carry her off."

"But we must first know in what convent she is to be found."

"That is true," said Porthos.

"But didn't you say that it was the Queen who made choice of the convent?" said Athos.

"Yes; at least, I believe so."

"Well, Porthos can help us here."

"And how so, if you please?"

"Why, your duchess, your princess, must have influence at Court."

"Hush!" said Porthos, placing a finger on his lips; "I believe she is a Cardinalist; she must know nothing of this."

"Then," said Aramis, "I will take it on myself to procure information."

"You, Aramis!" exclaimed the three friends; "and how?"

"Through the Queen's almoner, with whom I am great friends," said Aramis, blushing.

Upon this assurance the four friends, after a modest repast, separated.

CHAPTER XLII

THE INN OF THE COLOMBIER ROUGE

AS soon as he arrived, the King, who was in a hurry to meet the enemy, and who, with better reason than the Cardinal, shared his hatred of Buckingham, determined to make all the necessary preparations—first, for driving the English from the Isle of Ré, and then for pushing on the siege of La Rochelle.

As for the Musketeers, they took little part in the siege, were not kept very severely, and led a pleasant life. This was all the more easy for our three companions as, being the friends of M. de Tréville, they easily obtained permission to remain out after hours.

One evening when D'Artagnan, who was in the trenches, could not accompany them, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, mounted on their chargers, wrapped in their military cloaks, and with a hand on the butt of their pistols, were returning from a canteen, which Athos had discovered two days before on the La Jarrie road, and which was called the Colombier Rouge, when they heard a cavalcade approaching them. They immediately closed up, and waited in the middle of the road; after a moment, and as the moon appeared from behind a cloud, they saw at the turn of the road two horsemen who pulled up on seeing them, and seemed to be deliberating as to whether they should venture forward or go back. This hesitation awakened the suspicions of the three friends, and Athos cried with a firm voice:

"Who goes there?"

"Who goes there yourself?" replied one of the horsemen.

"That is no answer," said Athos. "Reply, or we shall charge."

"Take care what you are about, gentlemen," said a peremptory voice, which appeared to have the habit of commanding.

"It is some field-officer on his rounds," said Athos. "How shall we act, gentlemen?"

"Who are you?" said the same voice, in the same tone of command; "answer in your turn, or you may suffer for your disobedience."

"Musketeers of the King," said Athos, more and more convinced that the person who interrogated him had a right to do so.

"What company?"

"M. de Tréville's."

" Come forward, and inform me what you are doing here at this hour."

The three companions advanced, somewhat humbly, for they all felt that they had to deal with a person stronger than themselves. Athos served as spokesman.

One of the two horsemen who had spoken last was ten paces in front of his companion. Athos made a sign to Porthos and Aramis to remain where they were, while he advanced alone.

" I beg pardon, sir," said Athos, " but we did not know with whom we had to deal, and you can see that we were keeping good watch."

" Your name ? " said the officer, who covered a portion of his face with his cloak.

" But yourself, sir," said Athos, who began to be annoyed at this inquisitorial manner ; " furnish me with a proof, I beg of you, that you have a right to question me."

" Your name ? " repeated a second time the horseman, allowing his cloak to fall so that his face was uncovered.

" The Cardinal ! " ejaculated the amazed musketeer.

" Your name ? " repeated his Eminence for the third time.

" Athos."

The Cardinal made a sign to his equerry, who approached.

" These three musketeers must follow us. I do not wish it to be known that I have left the camp, and if they follow us we shall be sure that they will tell no one."

" We are gentlemen," said Athos ; " ask us for our word, Monseigneur, and do not have the least uneasiness. We know how to keep a secret."

The Cardinal fixed his piercing eyes on the daring speaker.

" You have a sharp ear, M. Athos," said the Cardinal, " but listen to me : it is not through distrust that I beg you to follow me, it is for my protection ; no doubt your two companions are MM. Porthos and Aramis ? "

" Yes, your Eminence," said Athos, while the two musketeers rode up hat in hand.

" I know you, gentlemen," said the Cardinal ; " I know that you are not entirely friendly to me, and I am sorry for it, but I know that you are brave and loyal gentlemen who can be trusted. So then, M. Athos, do me the honour to accompany me with your two friends, and then I shall have an escort which will make his Majesty jealous should we meet him."

The three musketeers bowed low over their horses' necks.

" Well, on my honour," said Athos, " your Eminence does well

to take us with you: we have met on the road some very ill-favoured faces, and we even had a dispute with four of them at the Colombier Rouge."

"A quarrel! and why, gentlemen?" said the Cardinal; "I do not like quarrels, you know."

"It is for that reason that I warn your Eminence of what has just happened, for you might learn this from others, and believe on a false report that we were to blame."

"And what was the result of this quarrel?" said the Cardinal, knitting his brows.

"My friend Aramis, who is here, received a slight wound in the arm, which will not hinder him, as your Eminence can see, from mounting to the assault to-morrow, should your Eminence order an escalade."

"But you are not men to take sword-thrusts like that," said the Cardinal: "come, speak out, gentlemen, you returned some of them? Make your confession, you know that I have the right of granting absolution."

"I, Monseigneur," said Athos, "did not even draw my sword, but I took the man I had to deal with and threw him out of the window. It appears," continued Athos, after some hesitation, "that in falling he broke his thigh."

"Ah!" said the Cardinal; "and you, M. Porthos?"

"I, Monseigneur, knowing that duelling is forbidden, I took up a bench and gave one of the brigands a blow, which I think broke his shoulder."

"Good," said the Cardinal; "and you, M. Aramis?"

"I, Monseigneur; as I am of a very gentle disposition, and as, besides, as Monseigneur may not know, I am about to take holy orders, I was trying to separate my comrades, when one of these wretches traitorously ran me through the left arm; then I lost patience and drew my sword, and, as he returned to the charge, I thought that as he rushed on me it went through his body."

"*Diable!* gentlemen," said the Cardinal; "three men *hors de combat* in a wineshop broil. You lay on well. And what was the quarrel about?"

"The scamps were drunk," said Athos, "and knowing that a woman had arrived at the inn, they wished to break open the door."

"Break open the door!" said the Cardinal; "what to do?"

"No doubt to do her violence," said Athos; "the fellows were tipsy."

"And the woman was young and pretty?" asked the Cardinal, with uneasiness.

"We did not see her, Monseigneur," said Athos.

"You did not see her; ah! very well," replied the Cardinal with vivacity, "you did well to defend the honour of a woman, and, as I am going to the Colombier Rouge myself, I shall know if you have spoken the truth."

"Monseigneur," said Athos proudly, "we are gentlemen, and we would not tell a falsehood to save our lives."

"Nor do I doubt what you say, M. Athos. But," he said, changing the conversation, "was this lady then alone?"

"This lady had an escort shut up with her," said Athos, "but as in spite of the noise he did not show himself, it is to be presumed that he is a coward."

"'Judge not rashly,' says the Gospel," replied the Cardinal.

Athos bowed.

"And now, gentlemen, that I know all I wanted, follow me."

The three musketeers ranged themselves behind the Cardinal, who once more wrapped his face in his cloak, and rode on eight or ten paces in front of his four companions.

They soon reached the silent and solitary inn; no doubt the landlord knew what illustrious visitor was expected, for he had sent away all the busybodies.

At ten paces from the door the Cardinal made a sign to his equerry and to the three musketeers to halt. A saddled horse was fastened to the window-shutter. The Cardinal knocked three times in a peculiar way.

A man wrapped up in a cloak instantly came out and exchanged a few words with the Cardinal, after which he mounted his horse and took the road to Paris.

"Advance, gentlemen," said the Cardinal. "You have told me the truth," he said, addressing the three musketeers; "and it will not be my fault should our meeting this evening not be to your advantage: in the meantime, follow me."

The Cardinal alighted, and the three musketeers did the same; the Cardinal threw the bridle of his horse to his equerry; the three musketeers tied their horses to the shutter.

The landlord stood at the door; for him the Cardinal was merely an officer coming to pay a lady a visit.

"Have you a room on the ground-floor where these gentlemen can wait for me near a good fire?" asked the Cardinal.

The landlord opened the door of a large room, in which he had just replaced a bad stove by an excellent fireplace.

"I have this," he said.

"Very good," replied the Cardinal; "will you enter, gentlemen, and wait for me? I shall not be more than half an hour."

And while the three musketeers entered the room on the ground-floor, the Cardinal, without asking for more information, ascended the stairs like a man who did not need to have the way pointed out to him.

CHAPTER XLIII

OF THE UTILITY OF STOVE-PIPES

IT was evident that without suspecting it, and actuated solely by their chivalrous and adventurous character, our three friends had rendered a service to some one whom the Cardinal honoured with his special protection.

Now, who was this some one? This was the question which the three musketeers asked themselves; then, finding that none of the replies made by their intellects were satisfactory, Porthos called the host and asked for dice.

Porthos and Aramis seated themselves at a table, and began playing. Athos walked up and down reflecting.

Whilst thinking and walking up and down, Athos passed and repassed in front of the dismantled stove-pipe whose other extremity projected into the room overhead, and every time he passed he heard a murmur of voices, which ended by attracting his attention. He drew near to it, and he no doubt heard something worthy of great interest, for he made a sign to his friends to be silent, and placed his ear to the orifice of the pipe.

"Listen, Milady," the Cardinal was saying; "the affair is important; sit down and let us talk."

"Milady!" murmured Athos.

"I will listen to your Eminence with the greatest attention," said a woman's voice which made Athos start.

"A small ship with an English crew, whose captain is in my service, is waiting for you at the mouth of the Charente, and will sail to-morrow."

"I must then start this evening?"

"Immediately; that is to say, as soon as you have received my instructions. Two men, whom you will find at the door on leaving, will escort you. You will let me leave first, and you will leave half an hour afterward."

"Yes, Monseigneur; now let us return to the mission with which you desire to entrust me; and as I am anxious to continue

to merit the confidence of your Eminence, condescend to explain it to me in terms clear and precise, so that I may commit no mistake."

There was an instant of profound silence, of which Athos availed himself to tell his friends to fasten the door and to come and listen with him.

"You must go to London," continued the Cardinal; "and when you arrive, you must go and see Buckingham."

"I will observe to your Eminence that since the affair of the diamond aiguillettes, concerning which the Duke has always suspected me, his Grace distrusts me."

"This time it is not a question of gaining his confidence, but of presenting yourself frankly and openly as a negotiator."

"Frankly and openly!" said Milady, with an unspeakable expression of duplicity.

"Yes, frankly and openly," repeated the Cardinal in the same tone; "all this negotiation must be carried on openly."

"I will follow to the letter the instructions of your Eminence."

"You will go to Buckingham from me, and you will tell him that I am aware of all the preparations which he is making, but that they do not give me much uneasiness, because at the first movement he attempts, I will ruin the Queen."

"Will he believe that your Eminence has the power to carry out this threat?"

"Yes, for I have the proofs."

"I must be able to present these proofs."

"No doubt; you will tell him that I will publish the report of Bois-Robert and of the Marquis de Beautru on the interview which the Duke had with the Queen on the night when Madame la Connétable gave a masked ball; you will tell him, so that he may have no doubt, that he was there in the costume of the Great Mogul, which was to have been worn by the Duc de Guise, but which he purchased from the Duc for three thousand pistoles."

"Very well, Monseigneur."

"You will give him all the details of his coming to the Palace disguised as an Italian fortune-teller, adding, to prove the correctness of my information, that he had under his cloak a long white dress embroidered with black tears, so that in the event of being surprised he might have passed himself off for the ghost of the White Lady, who always appears at the Louvre when a great event is about to take place."

"Is that all, Monseigneur?"

"You may add that his Grace, in his hurry to leave the Ile de

Ré, forgot a certain letter from Madame de Chevreuse, which greatly compromises the Queen, as it proves that her Majesty can not only love the enemies of the King, but that she can conspire with those of France. You recollect all I have said, do you not?"

"Your Eminence will judge: the ball of Madame la Connétable; the night at the Louvre; the letter of Madame de Chevreuse."

"That is it," said the Cardinal; "you have a capital memory, Milady."

"But if, in spite of all these reasons, the Duke should continue to threaten France?"

"The Duke loves like a madman, or rather, like a simpleton," said the Cardinal bitterly; "like the paladins of old, he has undertaken this war simply to obtain a look from his lady-love. If he knows that this war may cost the object of his affections her honour, and perhaps her liberty, I can answer for it that he will think over the matter twice."

"And yet," said Milady, with a persistency which proved that she wished to fathom the Cardinal's intentions, "if he should persist?"

"Well," continued the Cardinal, in an indifferent tone, "it would only be necessary to find a young, pretty, and clever woman, with some cause of revenge against the Duke. Such a woman may be discovered. The Duke is a man who by his promises of eternal constancy has created great havoc, and he must have sown the seeds of a great deal of hatred by his eternal infidelities."

"No doubt," Milady said coldly, "such a woman could be found."

"Well, such a woman, who would place the knife of Jacques Clément or of Ravaillac in the hands of a fanatic, would save France."

"Yes, but she would be the accomplice of an assassination."

"Did anyone ever discover the accomplices of Jacques Clément and Ravaillac?"

"No; but perhaps they were so high placed that no one dared to look for them. If I were the Queen Marie de Médicis, I should not take so many precautions as I take, being merely Lady Clarick."

"Quite so," said Richelieu; "what do you require, then?"

"I desire an order ratifying beforehand all that I may consider it my duty to do for the welfare of France."

"But you must first find the woman who might want to revenge herself."

"She is found," said Milady.

"Then she will have to find the wretched fanatic who will serve as the instrument of the justice of God."

"He shall be found."

"Well," said the Cardinal, "it will then be time enough to ask for the order which you seek."

"Your Eminence is quite right," said Milady, "and I was wrong to see in the mission with which you honour me anything but what it really amounts to."

And Milady recapitulated her instructions.

"That is quite right," repeated the Cardinal drily.

"And now," said Milady, without appearing to notice the Cardinal's altered tone, "now that I have received the instructions of your Eminence with regard to your enemies, perhaps you will permit me to say a few words concerning mine?"

"You also have enemies?" asked Richelieu.

"Yes, Monseigneur, enemies against whom you owe me support, for I made them in serving your Eminence."

"And who are they?" said the Cardinal.

"First of all, there is that little intriguing woman, Bonacieux."

"She is in the prison of Nantes."

"That is to say, she was," replied Milady; "but the Queen received an order from the King, in virtue of which she was transferred to a convent."

"To which convent?"

"I cannot say, for the secret has been well kept.

"I shall find out."

"And your Eminence will let me know?"

"I do not see any reason against it."

"Good! Then I have another enemy, from whom I have much more to fear than from little Madame Bonacieux."

"Who is he?"

"Her lover."

"What is his name?"

"Oh, your Eminence knows him well," cried Milady, carried away by passion. "He is the evil genius of both of us. It was he who ran De Wardes three times through the body. It was he who caused my failure in the affair of the diamonds. It is he who, knowing that I carried off Madame Bonacieux from him, has sworn my death."

"Ah!" said the Cardinal; "I know whom you mean."

"I mean that scoundrel D'Artagnan."

"He is a bold fellow," said the Cardinal.

"And all the more to be feared."

"Some proof of his dealings with Buckingham must be obtained."

"A proof? I will furnish ten!" cried Milady.

"Then it will be the simplest thing in the world. Get the proofs, and I will send him to the Bastille."

"Good, Monseigneur; but afterward?"

"When one goes to the Bastille, there is no afterward," said the Cardinal in a sinister tone. "Ah," he said, "if it were only as easy for me to get rid of my enemies as to get rid of yours——"

"Monseigneur, a life for a life, a man for a man! Give me this one, and I will give you the other."

"I do not know what you mean," replied the Cardinal, "and I do not even wish to know; but I want to please you, and can easily grant your desire concerning that paltry creature, especially as this D'Artagnan is a libertine, a duellist, and a traitor."

"An infamous scoundrel, Monseigneur!"

"Give me, then, a piece of paper and a pen and ink."

"Here they are, Monseigneur."

There was a moment's silence, which showed that the Cardinal was considering how he should word his order, or perhaps even writing it.

Athos, who had not lost a word of the conversation, took his two companions by the hand and led them to the other end of the room.

"Well," said Porthos, "what do you want, and why not listen to the end of the conversation?"

"Hush!" said Athos; "we have heard enough. Besides, I do not prevent you from listening; but I must go out."

"You must go out?" said Porthos. "But if the Cardinal asks for you?"

"You will not wait to be asked; you will say that I have gone on as a scout, as from certain words dropped by the landlord I suspected the road was dangerous. Besides, I will say a few words to the Cardinal's equerry. The rest concerns me. Don't be uneasy."

"Be prudent, Athos," said Aramis.

"Do not be alarmed," replied Athos. "You know that I keep cool."

Porthos and Aramis resumed their place by the stove-pipe.

As for Athos, he went out without any concealment, untied his horse, convinced the equerry of the necessity of an advanced guard for returning, looked to the priming of his pistols, put his sword between his teeth, and took the road to the camp.

CHAPTER XLIV

A CONJUGAL SCENE

AS Athos had foreseen, the Cardinal was not long before he came down.

He opened the door of the room which the musketeers had entered, and found Porthos playing at dice with Aramis.

A rapid glance which he threw round the apartment showed him that one of his men was missing.

"What has become of M. Athos?" he asked.

"Monseigneur, he has gone on to act as a scout; for, from what the landlord says, the roads are unsafe."

"Let us mount, then, gentlemen, for it is late."

The equerry was at the door, holding the Cardinal's horse.

A little further on appeared in the darkness a group of two men and three horses; the two men were to escort Milady to the port of La Pointe, and to see her embark.

Let us allow the Cardinal, his equerry, and the two musketeers to pursue their road to the camp, and let us return to Athos.

After riding a short distance he turned to the right, entered a thicket, and waited until the Cardinal and his escort had passed. He then returned at full gallop to the inn.

The landlord recognized him.

"My officer," said Athos, "forgot to tell the lady something important, and sent me back to repair his omission."

"Go up," said the landlord; "she is still in her room."

Athos took advantage of the permission, ascended the stairs quietly, and through the half-open door saw Milady, who was tying her hat.

He entered, and closed the door behind him.

At the noise which he made in pushing the bolt, Milady turned round.

On seeing this face, mute and motionless as a statue, Milady felt a sudden fear.

"Who are you? What do you require?" she asked.

"Yes, it is indeed she!" murmured Athos.

And allowing his cloak to fall, and raising his hat, he advanced toward Milady.

"Do you recognize me, madame?" he said.

Milady took a step forward, and then recoiled as at the sight of a serpent.

"I see that you recognize me," said Athos.

"The Comte de la Fère!" murmured Milady, growing pale, and drawing back until the wall prevented her from going further.

"Yes, Milady, the Comte de la Fère in person, who has come from the other world for the express pleasure of seeing you. Let us sit down and talk, as the Cardinal said."

Milady, a prey to an inexpressible terror, sat down without saying a word.

"You thought that I was dead, did you not, as I thought you dead? And my name of Athos concealed the Comte de la Fère as the name of Lady Clarick concealed that of Anne de Bueil! Was it not thus that you were named when your worthy brother married us? Our position is truly strange," said Athos, laughing; "we have hitherto lived only because each thought the other dead."

"But," said Milady in a faint voice, "what brings you back?—what do you want?"

"I wish to say that, while remaining invisible, I have not lost sight of you."

A smile of incredulity passed over the lips of Milady.

"Listen. It was you who cut the diamonds from the shoulders of Buckingham; it was you who had Madame Bonacieux carried off; it was you who, in love with M. de Wardes, and thinking to pass the night with him, opened your door to M. d'Artagnan; it was you who, thinking that M. de Wardes had deceived you, determined to have him killed by his rival; it was you who, when this rival had discovered your infamous secret, determined to kill him in his turn, and sent two assassins in pursuit of him; it was you who, seeing the bullets had missed their mark, sent some poisoned wine and a forged letter to your would-be victim; it is you who, seated in this chair, have just entered into an engagement to murder the Duke of Buckingham in exchange for a promise to allow you to assassinate D'Artagnan."

Milady was livid.

"Are you then Satan?" she said.

"Perhaps," said Athos; "but at all events listen well to this. Whether you murder the Duke of Buckingham, or have him

murdered, matters little to me. I do not know him ; besides, he is an Englishman ; but do not touch a hair of D'Artagnan's head with the tip of your finger ; he is a faithful friend whom I love and shall defend. If you do, I swear to you by the head of my father, that crime shall be your last."

" D'Artagnan has cruelly offended me," said Milady ; " D'Artagnan shall die."

Athos' brain reeled. The sight of this creature, who had nothing of a woman about her, recalled hideous memories ; he remembered that one day, in a situation less dangerous, he had already tried to sacrifice her to his honour ; his desire to murder her came back like a burning fever. He rose, pulled a pistol from his belt, and cocked it.

Milady, pale as death, would have cried out, but her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth, and she could only utter a sound which had nothing human in it ; it was like the death-rattle of a wild beast. Shrinking against the dark tapestry, she appeared, with her dishevelled hair, a frightful image of terror.

Athos slowly raised his pistol and stretched out his arm so that the weapon almost touched the forehead of Milady ; then, with a voice all the more terrible because it was calm, and betokened an inflexible resolution :

" Madame," he said, " you will hand me at once the paper signed by the Cardinal, or, on my honour, I will blow your brains out."

With another man Milady might have entertained some doubts, but she knew Athos. Yet she remained motionless.

" You have a second to decide," said he.

Milady saw by the contraction of his face that the shot was about to be fired.

She raised her hand sharply to her breast and drew out a paper, which she handed to Athos.

" Here," she said, " and a curse on you ! "

Athos took the paper, replaced the pistol in his belt, approached a lamp to assure himself, unfolded the paper and read :

> It is by my order, and for the welfare of the State, that the bearer of the present has done what has been done.
>
> *December* 3, 1627 RICHELIEU

" And now," said Athos, resuming his cloak and hat, " now that I have drawn your teeth, viper, bite if you can."

And he left the room without looking behind him.

At the door he found the two men and the horse they were holding.

"Gentlemen, the order of Monseigneur, as you know, is to take this woman without loss of time to the port of La Pointe, and not to leave her until she steps on board."

As these words agreed with the orders they had received, they bowed by way of assent.

Athos jumped lightly into his saddle and rode off at a gallop, but instead of following the road he went across country, spurring his horse and stopping every now and then to listen.

During one of these halts he heard the sound of horses' feet, and had little doubt that it was the Cardinal and his escort. He rode on a little further, rubbed down his horse with some heather, and took up a position across the road at two hundred yards from the camp.

"Who comes there?" he cried, when he saw the horsemen.

"It is our gallant musketeer, I think," said the Cardinal.

"Yes, Monseigneur," said Porthos, "it is he."

"M. Athos," said the Cardinal, "receive my thanks for your good guard. Gentlemen, we have arrived; take the gate to the left; the watchword is *Roi* and *Ré*."

Saying these words, the Cardinal saluted the three friends and rode away with his equerry.

"Well," said Porthos and Aramis together, when the Cardinal was beyond earshot, "he signed the paper she asked for."

"I know that, for here it is," said Athos.

And the three friends rode on in silence.

On reaching their quarters they sent Mousqueton to tell Planchet that they wished to see D'Artagnan as soon as he left the trenches.

On her side, Milady made no difficulty about following the men whom she found at her door. She thought for a moment of going to the Cardinal and telling him what had happened, but she feared that a revelation on her part would lead to a revelation on the part of Athos. She thought it best to remain silent, to accomplish her mission with skill, and then to claim vengeance from the Cardinal.

In consequence she travelled all night, and the next morning sailed for England.

CHAPTER XLV

THE SAINT-GERVAIS BASTION

ON arriving at the quarters of his three friends, D'Artagnan found them gathered together; Athos was meditating, Porthos twirled his moustache, Aramis was reading his prayers from a charming little book bound in blue velvet.

"*Pardieu*, gentlemen," he said, "I hope what you have to tell me is worth while, otherwise I shall never forgive you for sending for me, instead of allowing me to rest after a night spent in taking and dismantling a bastion. Ah! why you were not there, gentlemen! it was hot work!"

"Let us go to the Parpaillot inn," said Athos, "for here the walls are like paper."

D'Artagnan, who was accustomed to the way in which Athos did things, and who knew at once by a word or a sign when matters were serious, took his arm and went out without asking any questions. Porthos and Aramis followed them.

On the way they met Grimaud. Athos motioned to him to follow. Grimaud, as usual, obeyed in silence. The poor fellow had almost forgotten how to speak.

They arrived at the bar of the Parpaillot; it was 7 A.M., the day was just breaking.

The three friends ordered breakfast, and entered a room where according to the landlord they would not be disturbed.

Unfortunately, the hour was badly chosen; the réveillé had just been sounded, every one was trying to shake off sleep, and in order to keep out the morning damp, came to drink a drop at the bar: dragoons, Swiss, guards, musketeers, light-horse, succeeded each other with a rapidity which paid the host very well, but which answered the purpose of the four friends very badly. They replied in a sulky way to the salutations, the toasts, and the jokes of their companions.

"We shall soon have a quarrel on our hands," said Athos, "and we have no need of that. Tell us what you did last night, D'Artagnan; we will tell you what we did afterward."

"Yes," said a light-cavalry man, who was sipping a glass of brandy, "you were in the trenches last night, gentlemen of the Guards, and it seems you had a hot time of it with the Rochelais."

D'Artagnan looked at Athos to know if he should reply to this intruder in their conversation.

"Well," said Athos, "do you not hear M. de Busigny, who

does you the honour to speak to you? Tell us what happened last night, since these gentlemen desire to know."

"Did you not take a bastion?" asked a Swiss, who was drinking rum out of a beer glass.

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, bowing, "we had that honour; we even, as you may have heard, placed under one of the angles a barrel of gunpowder, which in bursting made a very pretty breach, besides which the rest of the bastion, which is an old one, was very much damaged."

"And what bastion is it?" asked a dragoon, who had a goose, which he was going to have cooked, spitted on his sabre.

"The Saint-Gervais bastion," said D'Artagnan, "from behind which the Rochelais were annoying our working parties."

"And the affair was warm?"

"Yes; we lost five men, and the Rochelais eight or ten."

"But very likely," said the light-cavalry man, "they will send pioneers this morning to repair the bastion."

"Yes, very likely," said D'Artagnan.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "a wager!"

"What about?" asked the light-cavalry man.

"Well, M. de Busigny, I will bet with you that my three comrades and myself will go and breakfast in the Saint-Gervais bastion, and that we will remain there an hour, no matter what the enemy does to dislodge us."

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other and began to understand.

"But," said D'Artagnan, whispering to Athos, "you will have us killed without pity."

"We shall be more surely killed," replied Athos, "if we don't go."

"Well!" said Porthos, throwing himself back in a chair, "that is a handsome bet, gentlemen."

"And I accept it," said M. de Busigny. "Now we must fix the stakes."

"There are four of you, gentlemen, and we are four; a dinner for eight. Will that suit you?"

"Capitally," replied M. de Busigny.

"Perfectly," said the dragoon.

"That suits me," said the Swiss.

The fourth man nodded assent.

"Your breakfast is ready, gentlemen," said the landlord.

"Well, bring it in," said Athos.

The host obeyed. Athos called Grimaud, showed him a large

basket which was lying in the corner, and made a sign to him to wrap up the viands in the napkins.

Grimaud at once understood that they were going to breakfast on the grass, packed up the food, and added a few bottles.

"M. de Busigny," said Athos, "will you set your watch by mine, or allow me to set mine by yours?"

"Certainly, sir," said the light-cavalry man, drawing out of his fob a very handsome watch, surrounded with diamonds. "Half-past seven," he said.

"Seven thirty-five," said Athos; "I am five minutes fast by you, sir."

And bowing to the astonished spectators, the four young men took the road to the Saint-Gervais bastion, followed by Grimaud, who carried the basket, not knowing where he was going, with that passive obedience which Athos had taught him.

As long as they were inside the camp, the young men did not exchange a word; besides, they were followed by a number of inquisitive individuals, who, having heard of the wager, wished to know how they would come out of it.

But once they had crossed the defences, D'Artagnan, who was completely ignorant of their intentions, thought it time to ask for an explanation.

"And now, my dear Athos," he said, "do me the pleasure to say where we are going."

"You see," said Athos, "we are going to the bastion."

"But what are we going to do there?"

"You know very well; we are going to breakfast."

"But why did we not breakfast at the Parpaillot?"

"Because we have very important things to tell you, and that it was impossible to speak for five minutes there without being interrupted. Yonder," said Athos, pointing to the bastion, "no one will disturb us."

"It appears to me," said D'Artagnan, with that prudence which in him was allied to excessive courage, "that we might have found a suitable spot on the downs along the seashore."

"Where we should have been seen conferring together, so that the Cardinal would be warned within a quarter of an hour that we were holding a council."

"Yes," said Aramis, "Athos is right."

"But it seems to me," said Porthos, "that on such an expedition we should at least have brought our muskets."

"You are a simpleton, Porthos; why burden ourselves with a useless load?"

"I do not find a good musket and twelve cartridges useless in presence of an enemy."

"Did you not hear what D'Artagnan said," rejoined Athos, "that in the attack of last night, there were eight or ten Frenchmen, and as many Rochelais, killed? There has been no time to despoil them."

"Well?"

"Well! we shall find their muskets and ammunition, and have a hundred rounds to fire."

"Athos!" exclaimed Aramis, "you are really a great man."

Porthos bent his head in sign of adhesion.

D'Artagnan alone did not appear convinced.

When they arrived at the bastion, the four friends turned round.

More than three hundred soldiers of all arms were assembled at the gate of the camp, and they could distinguish M. de Busigny, the dragoon, the Swiss, and the fourth wagerer in a separate group.

Athos took off his hat, placed it on the point of his sword, and waved it.

All the spectators returned his salute, accompanying this piece of politeness with a loud cheer, which reached the four friends.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE MUSKETEERS HOLD A COUNCIL

AS Athos had foreseen, the bastion was occupied only by a dozen dead Frenchmen and Rochelais.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, who had taken command of the expedition, "while Grimaud is laying the table, let us pick up the muskets and the cartridges; we can talk while doing this. These gentlemen," he added, pointing to the dead men, "are not listening."

The four musketeers went to work, and they had just loaded the last musket when Grimaud announced that breakfast was ready.

Grimaud was ordered to act as sentinel, but to relieve the tediousness of his duty, Athos allowed him to take a loaf, two cutlets, and a bottle of wine.

"And now to table," said Athos.

The four friends sat down with their legs crossed, like Turks or tailors.

"And now that you no longer fear being overheard," said D'Artagnan, "I hope you will reveal your secret."

"The secret is that I saw Milady last night."

D'Artagnan was raising his glass to his lips, but at Milady's name his hand trembled to such an extent, that he had to put it down.

"You saw your wi——"

"Hush!" said Athos; "you forget that these gentlemen are not acquainted, like you, with my family affairs. I saw Milady."

"And where?" asked D'Artagnan.

"About two leagues from here, at the Colombier Rouge."

"In that case I am a lost man."

"Not quite so, for she must have left France by this."

D'Artagnan breathed again.

"But after all," asked Porthos, "who is this Milady?"

"A charming woman," said Athos, sipping a glass of sparkling wine.

"Scamp of a host!" he cried, "he has given us Anjou wine for Champagne. Yes, a charming woman; she was very kind to D'Artagnan, who played her I know not what trick, for which she has been trying to revenge herself, a month ago by attempting to have him shot, then by trying to poison him, and now, by asking the Cardinal for his head."

"What! asking for my head!" cried D'Artagnan, pale with terror.

"That," said Porthos, "is as true as the Gospel; I heard it with my own ears."

"So did I," said Aramis.

"Then," said D'Artagnan, letting his hand fall listlessly, "it is useless to struggle any longer; I may as well blow out my brains and have done with it."

"That is the last folly one should commit," said Athos, "seeing that it is the only one for which there is no remedy."

"But I shall never escape," said D'Artagnan, "with such enemies after me. First of all, my stranger of Meung; then M. de Wardes; then Milady, whose secret I surprised; then the Cardinal, whose vengeance I thwarted."

"Well," said Athos, "that makes only four, and we are four."

"You were saying that Milady had left France; and where is she going?" asked D'Artagnan.

"She is going to England," replied Athos.

"And for what object?"

"To murder Buckingham, or to have him murdered."

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise and indignation.

"But that is infamous!" he cried.

"Oh! as to that," said Athos, "it is no concern of mine. Now that you have finished, Grimaud, take the corporal's pike, tie a napkin to it, and stick it on the top of the bastion, so that those rebels of Rochelais may see that they have to deal with brave and loyal soldiers of the King."

Grimaud obeyed without replying. A moment later the white flag waved over the heads of the four friends. Thunders of applause saluted its appearance; half the camp had turned out.

"What!" replied D'Artagnan, "you care little whether she kills Buckingham, or causes him to be killed? But the Duke is our friend."

"The Duke is English, the Duke is fighting against us."

"One moment," said D'Artagnan; "I cannot abandon the Duke thus; he gave us some very fine chargers."

"And some very handsome saddles," said Porthos.

"Besides," said Aramis, "God desires the conversion and not the death of a sinner."

"Amen," said Athos. "We will return to that subject later on if you like; but what interested me most for the moment was to recover from that woman the sort of *carte blanche* which she had extorted from the Cardinal, and with the aid of which she was to get rid of you, and perhaps of us."

"This creature is a demon!" said Porthos, holding out his plate to Aramis, who was carving a fowl.

"And does this *carte blanche* remain in her hands?" asked D'Artagnan.

"No, it passed into mine; I shall not say without trouble, for I should be telling a falsehood."

"My dear Athos, I cannot count the number of times I have owed you my life. And you have this letter from the Cardinal?"

"Here it is."

And Athos took the precious document from his pocket.

D'Artagnan unfolded it with a trembling hand, and read:

> It is by my order, and for the welfare of the State, that the bearer of the present has done what has been done.
>
> *December* 3, 1627 RICHELIEU

"Yes," said Aramis, "it is an absolution in due form."

"You must tear up that paper," said D'Artagnan, who seemed to have read his death-warrant.

"On the contrary," said Athos, "it must be preserved preciously; I would not give up this paper were anyone to cover it with gold pieces."

"And what is she going to do now?" asked D'Artagnan.

"She will probably write to the Cardinal," said Athos negligently, "and say that a cursed musketeer called Athos took her safe-conduct from her by force, and she will advise his Eminence to get rid of him and his two friends Porthos and Aramis. The Cardinal will remember that he is constantly meeting these men on his road; one fine morning he will have D'Artagnan arrested, and lest he should weary all alone, he will send us to keep him company in the Bastille."

"Come," said Porthos, "you are making very lugubrious jokes."

"I am not joking," said Athos.

"Since that is the case," said Porthos, "why did you not drown, strangle, or hang her? The dead alone do not return."

"You think that, Porthos?" replied the musketeer, with a gloomy smile which D'Artagnan alone understood.

"I have an idea," said D'Artagnan.

"What is it?" said the musketeers.

"To arms!" shouted Grimaud.

The young men jumped up and ran to their muskets.

A little force was advancing, composed of from twenty to twenty-five soldiers.

"Supposing we return to camp?" said Porthos. "It seems to me that the game is not equal."

"Impossible, for three reasons," said Athos: "the first is that we have not finished breakfast; the second is that we have still some important matters to talk over; the third is that it wants ten minutes of the hour."

"Come," said Aramis, "we must draw up a plan of battle."

"That is very simple," said Athos; "as soon as the enemy is within shot, let us fire; if he continues to advance, let us fire again; we will fire as long as our ammunition lasts; if what remains of the troop attempts an assault, we will allow them to descend into the ditch, and then we will push down on their heads that piece of wall, which has remained standing by a miracle."

"Bravo!" cried Porthos; "decidedly, Athos, you were born to be a general; and the Cardinal, who considers himself a great soldier, is nothing compared to you."

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "no overlapping. Let each one aim at his man."

"I cover mine," said D'Artagnan.

"And I mine," said Porthos.

"And I," said Aramis.

"Then fire," said Athos.

The four shots made but one report, but four men fell.

Immediately the drum beat, and the little force advanced at the double. The firing was then continued without regularity, but with the same precision. However, as the Rochelais appeared to be aware of the numerical weakness of their opponents, they continued to advance at a run.

Out of three shots two men fell, but those who remained pushed on. On reaching the foot of the bastion, the enemy's force was still from twelve to fifteen strong. They were received by a last volley, which did not stop them; they jumped into the ditch, and prepared to scale the breach.

"Come, my friends," cried Athos, "let us make an end; to the wall! to the wall!"

And the four friends, helped by Grimaud, began to bear with the barrels of their muskets on an enormous portion of the wall, which leaned over as if pushed by the wind, and becoming detached from its base, fell with a horrible noise into the ditch; a great cry was heard, a cloud of dust ascended to heaven, and all was over.

"Can we have crushed them all?" said Athos.

"It appears so," said D'Artagnan.

"No," said Porthos, "there are two or three limping away."

Three or four unfortunate wretches, covered with dirt and blood, were flying along the hollow road toward the town. This was all that remained of the little troop. Athos looked at his watch.

"Gentlemen, we have been here for an hour, and our bet is won; but we win handsomely; besides, D'Artagnan has not told us his idea."

And the musketeer, with his usual coolness, sat down before the remains of the breakfast.

"My idea," said D'Artagnan, "is to go to England a second time, and to see the Duke of Buckingham."

"You will not do that, D'Artagnan," said Athos coldly.

"And why not? Have I not already done it?"

"Yes; but at that time we were not at war; the Duke of

Buckingham was an ally, and not an enemy ; what you wish to do would be considered treason."

D'Artagnan understood the force of this reasoning, and remained silent.

" Ah ! what is going on in the town ? " said Athos.

" They are calling to arms."

The four friends listened, and the noise of the drum clearly reached their ears.

" You will see that they will send a whole regiment against us," said Athos.

" You do not intend trying to resist a whole regiment ? " said Porthos.

" Why not ? " replied Athos ; " I feel in the humour, and I would hold out against an army if we had only had the precaution to bring another dozen bottles."

" On my honour, the drum is approaching," said D'Artagnan.

" Let it approach," said Athos ; " it is a quarter of an hour from the city to here. That is more time than we require to draw up our plan ; if we leave this place we shall never find so suitable a one again. Now, this is the idea which occurs to me."

" Tell us."

" Allow me to give Grimaud some indispensable orders."

Athos motioned to his valet to approach.

" Grimaud," said Athos, pointing to the dead men who were lying in the bastion ; " you must take these gentlemen, and stand them up against the wall ; you will put their hats on their heads, and their muskets in their hands."

" O great man ! " said D'Artagnan, " I understand you."

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative.

" That is all that is necessary," said Athos ; " let us return to my idea. This Milady, this woman, this creature, this demon, has a brother-in-law, I think you told me, D'Artagnan ? "

" Yes, I know him pretty well, and I think that he has not much sympathy for his sister-in-law."

" There is no harm in that," replied Athos ; " it would be even better if he hated her."

" But," said Porthos, " I should like to understand what Grimaud is doing."

" Silence, Porthos ! " said Aramis.

" What is the name of this brother-in-law ? "

" Lord de Winter."

" Where is he now ? "

" He returned to London on the first rumour of war."

"Well! that is just the man we require," said Athos; "he is the man we should inform; we will let him know that his sister-in-law is about to murder some one, and we will beg of him not to lose sight of her. There is in London, I hope, some establishment like the Madelonnettes or the Penitent Women. Let him shut up his sister and we will be at peace."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan; "until she gets out again."

"That is the best thing we can do," said Aramis; "we will warn the Queen and Lord de Winter at the same time."

"Yes, but who will take the letters to Tours and to London?"

"I will answer for Bazin," said Aramis.

"And I for Planchet," said D'Artagnan.

"Of course!" said Porthos, "if we cannot leave the camp, our lackeys can."

"No doubt," said Aramis; "we will write the letters to-day, give them money, and let them start."

"We will give them money?" said Athos; "have you got any?"

The four friends looked at each other, and a cloud passed over each brow.

"Quick!" cried D'Artagnan; "I see spots of black and red in motion yonder; what did you say about a regiment, Athos? It is an army."

"*Ma foi!* yes," said Athos; "here they are. What crafty fellows to come without drums or trumpets! Ah! have you finished, Grimaud?"

Grimaud made a sign that he had, and showed a dozen dead bodies which he had placed in the most picturesque attitudes.

"Bravo!" said Athos; "that does honour to your imagination."

"All the same," said Porthos; "I should like to understand."

"Let us make off first," said D'Artagnan; "you will understand afterward."

"One moment, gentlemen; let us give Grimaud time to remove the breakfast things."

"Ah!" said Aramis, "the spots are getting visibly larger, and I am of D'Artagnan's opinion."

"Well," said Athos, "I have nothing more to say against a retreat; we have remained an hour and a half. Let us go, gentlemen."

Grimaud had already gone ahead with the basket and the dessert.

The four friends left after him, and proceeded a few paces.

"Ah!" cried Athos, "what are we about, gentlemen?"

"Have you forgotten something?" asked Aramis.

"And the flag, *morbleu*! We must not leave that in the hands of the enemy, although it is only a napkin."

And Athos sprang into the bastion, ascended the platform, and carried off the flag; but as the Rochelais were within range, they opened a terrible fire on this man, who, as if for pleasure, had exposed himself.

But one would have thought that Athos wore some charm; the bullets whistled round him on all sides, but none of them touched him.

Athos waved his flag, turning his back to the enemy and saluting the camp.

Two shouts were heard: a shout of rage on one side, a shout of enthusiasm on the other.

A second volley followed the first, and three bullets piercing it, turned the napkin really into a flag.

From the camp came cries of "Come down! come down!"

Athos descended.

His comrades, who had waited for him with anxiety, saw him reappear with joy.

"Come, Athos, come," said D'Artagnan, "let us step out; now that we have found everything but the money, it would be foolish to be killed."

But Athos continued to march majestically, in spite of the observations of his companions, who, seeing that remonstrance was useless, regulated their pace by his.

Grimaud and his basket had gone on before, and were out of range.

After a moment a tremendous fire was heard.

"What is that?" asked Porthos; "and what are they firing at? I do not hear any bullets whistling, and I see no one."

"They are firing on the dead men," said Athos.

"But the dead man will not reply."

"Just so; therefore they suspect a trap; they will deliberate; they will send a truce-bearer, and when they find out the trick, we shall be out of range."

"Ah! I understand," cried Porthos.

"Better late than never!" said Athos, shrugging his shoulders. "And we came off without a scratch," he continued. "Or am I wrong? what is the matter with your hand, D'Artagnan? Blood, it seems to me."

"It is nothing," said D'Artagnan.

" A spent ball ? "

" Not even that."

" What is it, then ? "

We have said that Athos loved D'Artagnan like his son, and this gloomy and inflexible character had at times all the solicitude of a father for the young man.

" My fingers were caught between two stones, one in the wall and that in my ring."

" Serves you right for wearing diamonds," said Athos disdainfully.

" What ! " cried Porthos ; " he has a diamond, and we complain of not having money ! "

" Capital, Porthos ; this time you have an idea."

" To be sure," said Porthos, flattered by the compliment paid to him by Athos ; " since there is a diamond, let us sell it."

" But," said D'Artagnan, " it is the diamond of the Queen."

" The greater the reason," said Athos ; " the Queen saving the Duke of Buckingham, her lover—nothing more just ; the Queen saving us who are her friends—nothing more moral ; let us sell the diamond."

" Well," said D'Artagnan gaily, " let us sell the diamond, and say no more of it."

The firing continued, but the friends were out of range.

" It was high time that this idea occurred to Porthos, for here we are in camp. Therefore, gentlemen, not another word on the subject. They are watching us, they are coming out to meet us, and we shall be carried in triumph."

Indeed, the whole camp was in commotion; more than two thousand men had witnessed the piece of folly committed by the four friends without suspecting its real motive.

There was heard but one cry, " *Vive les gardes ! Vive les mousquetaires ! "*

M. de Busigny had been the first to clasp the hand of Athos, and to own that he had lost his wager.

The dragoon and the Swiss had followed him, and all their comrades had followed them.

There was no end to the congratulations, the shaking of hands, the embracing, and the shouts of laughter at the expense of the Rochelais ; in fact, a tumult so great that the Cardinal thought there was a revolt, and sent La Houdinière, the Captain of his Guards, to learn what was going on.

The affair was related to the messenger with all the effervescence of enthusiasm.

" Well ? " asked the Cardinal, on seeing La Houdinière.

" Well, Monseigneur, three musketeers and a guard laid a wager with M. de Busigny that they would go and breakfast in the Saint-Gervais bastion, and while breakfasting they held out for two hours against the enemy, and killed I know not how many Rochelais."

" Did you learn the names of the musketeers ? "

" Yes, Monseigneur : Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

" Always my three gallant fellows ! " murmured the Cardinal ; " and the guard ? "

" M. d'Artagnan."

" Always my young rogue ! Decidedly these four men must enter my service."

That same evening the Cardinal spoke to M. de Tréville of the exploit of the morning, which was the talk of the whole camp.

M. de Tréville, who had heard the adventure related by the heroes themselves, furnished the Cardinal with all the details, without forgetting the napkin.

" Very good, M. de Tréville," said the Cardinal ; " I beg you will send me the napkin. I will have three *fleurs-de-lis* embroidered in gold on it, and I will give it to your company."

" Monseigneur," said M. de Tréville, " that would be unjust towards the Guards. M. d'Artagnan belongs to M. des Essarts."

" Well, then, take him," said the Cardinal ; " it is only right that when four gallant soldiers are so attached to each other they should serve in the same company."

The same evening M. de Tréville announced this good news to the three musketeers and to D'Artagnan, inviting them all four to dine with him the next day.

D'Artagnan was wild with joy. It was the dream of his life, as we know, to be a musketeer.

" *Ma foi !* " said D'Artagnan to Athos, " you had a triumphant idea ; and, as you said, we have acquired glory and enjoyed a conversation of the highest importance."

" Which we can resume now without anyone suspecting us, for, with God's assistance, we shall be looked upon henceforth as Cardinalists."

The same evening D'Artagnan presented his respects to M. des Essarts, and acquainted him with the promotion which he had obtained.

M. des Essarts, who greatly liked D'Artagnan, offered to help him, the change of corps entailing the expense of a new equipment.

D'Artagnan refused, but considering the opportunity a good one, he begged him to have the diamond valued, as he wished to turn it into money.

The next morning the valet of M. des Essarts handed to D'Artagnan a bag containing seven thousand livres.

It was the price of the Queen's diamond.

CHAPTER XLVII

A FAMILY AFFAIR

ATHOS had discovered the expression, "family affair." A family affair did not come within the province of the Cardinal.

Aramis had found the idea—the lackeys.

Porthos had found the means—the diamond.

In the evening the four friends met. There were three things to decide:

What they should write to Milady's brother.

What they should write to the clever person at Tours.

Which of the lackeys should carry these letters.

Each one offered his own.

Athos praised the discretion of Grimaud, Porthos the strength of Mousqueton, Aramis the skill of Bazin, and D'Artagnan the bravery of Planchet, who had behaved so well at Boulogne.

A long discussion followed on these respective virtues.

"I would almost answer for Planchet," said D'Artagnan.

"Well, add to his natural devotion a round sum of money which will place him in easy circumstances, and you will double his devotion."

"You will be deceived, all the same," said Athos, who was an optimist with regard to things, and a pessimist with regard to men. "To go to England," Athos lowered his voice, "one must cross the whole of France, which is thick with the spies and creatures of the Cardinal; one must have a pass in order to embark; one must know English, to ask one's way to London. I find the matter extremely difficult."

"Not at all," said D'Artagnan, who was greatly interested in the plan being carried out. "Of course, if we write to Lord de Winter in plain terms; if we abuse the Cardinal——"

"Hush!" said Athos.

"Speak of intrigues and State secrets, we shall be broken on

the wheel. But do not forget, Athos, that we shall write upon family affairs, with the object of rendering it impossible for Milady, on her arrival in London, to hurt us. I will then write to him in such terms as these :

" ' Sir, and dear friend——' "

" Ah, yes ! ' Dear friend ' to an Englishman," interrupted Athos. " That is a fine beginning ! Bravo, D'Artagnan ! That expression alone would suffice to have you quartered."

" Well, be it so. I shall say ' Sir ' only."

" You can even say ' Milord,' " said Athos, who respected etiquette.

" ' Milord, do you remember the little enclosure where your life was saved ? ' "

" My dear D'Artagnan," said Athos, " you are a bad letter-writer. Handle the musket and the sword, and you will distinguish yourself ; but leave the pen to the *abbé*—that is his business."

" So be it," said D'Artagnan. " Draw up this note, Aramis ; but, by our holy Father the Pope, be concise, or I will criticize you in my turn."

"Very good," replied Aramis, with that simple-minded confidence which every poet has in himself ; " but I must know more about the matter. The details have escaped my memory."

D'Artagnan and Athos looked at each other for some time in silence.

Then, after some reflection, Athos, even paler than usual, made a sign to D'Artagnan, who understood that he was at liberty to speak.

" Well, this is what you must say," resumed D'Artagnan :

" ' Milord, your sister-in-law is a profligate woman, who wanted to get you killed in order to inherit your fortune. But she could not marry your brother, having already been married in France, and having been——' "

D'Artagnan hesitated, as if looking for the word.

" ' Repudiated by her husband,' " said Athos.

" ' Because she had been branded,' " continued D'Artagnan.

" What ! " cried Porthos. " She wished to have her brother-in-law killed ? "

" Yes."

" She was married before ? " asked Aramis.

" Yes."

" And her husband discovered that she had a *fleur-de-lis* on the shoulder ? "

"Yes."

"And who has seen this *fleur-de-lis*?" asked Aramis.

"D'Artagnan and I; or rather, to observe chronological order, I and D'Artagnan," replied Athos.

"And the husband of this terrible creature is still alive?" said Aramis.

"He is."

There was a moment's silence, each one being affected according to his nature.

Aramis took up his pen, and, after a short hesitation, wrote as follows:

My Lord,

The person who writes you these lines had the honour of crossing swords with you in Paris. As you were afterward pleased to call yourself the friend of that person, he thinks fit to return that friendship by a timely warning.

Twice you have nearly been the victim of a near relation, who you believe will inherit your possessions, because you are not aware that, before contracting marriage in England, she was already married in France. But the third time, which is the present one, you may succumb.

Your relative left La Rochelle for England during the night. Watch for her arrival, for she has terrible designs. If you wish to know of what she is capable, read her past history on her left shoulder.

"Excellent," said Athos; "you wield the pen like a Secretary of State, my dear Aramis. Lord de Winter will be on his guard if this letter reaches him, and if it falls into the hands of his Eminence, we shall not be compromised. But as the valet might not go to London, we must give him only half the sum promised, and the other half on receiving an answer. Have you got the diamond?" said Athos.

"I have better than that," said D'Artagnan, "I have the money," and he threw the bag on the table.

At the sound of the gold Aramis looked up, Porthos started, but Athos remained impassive.

"How much is in that little bag?" he asked.

"Seven thousand livres."

"Seven thousand livres for a little diamond!" exclaimed Porthos.

"But with all that, gentlemen, we are forgetting the Queen. Let us look after the health of her dear Buckingham. We owe him no less."

"That is true," said Athos; "but it concerns Aramis."

Aramis resumed his pen, and after further reflection wrote the following lines, which he submitted to the approbation of his friends:

"'My dear Cousin——'"

"Ah!" said Athos, "she is a relation, this clever person."

Aramis continued:

"My dear Cousin,

His Eminence the Cardinal, whom God preserve for the glory of France and the confusion of her enemies, is about to finish with the heretical rebels of La Rochelle; it is probable that the English fleet of succour will not arrive even in sight of the town. I will even presume to say that the Duke of Buckingham will be prevented from embarking by some great event. His Eminence is the most illustrious politician of times past, present, and probably to come. He would put out the sun if it were in his way. Convey these happy tidings to your sister, my dear Cousin. I dreamt that this accursed Englishman was dead. I cannot remember whether stabbed or poisoned. But I dreamt that he was dead, and you know that my dreams seldom deceive me. So rest assured that you will see me soon."

"Capital!" exclaimed Athos. "There remains only the address."

Aramis took the letter, folded it up, and wrote:

"Mademoiselle Michon, Laundress, at Tours."

The three friends looked at each other and laughed; they were caught.

"Now," said Aramis, "you understand that Bazin alone can take this letter to Tours; my cousin knows only Bazin, and has confidence only in him. Besides, Bazin is ambitious and learned. Bazin has read history; he knows that Sextus V became Pope, after having tended a herd of swine. Well, he counts upon entering the Church at the same time that I do, and does not despair of becoming Pope, or at least a cardinal. You understand that a man with such ambitions will not let himself be caught, or, if he be caught, will undergo martyrdom sooner than speak."

"Good," said D'Artagnan; "I grant you Bazin, but grant me Planchet. I beg that Planchet may be selected to go to London. He has been there before, and knows how to say 'London, sir, if you please,' and 'My master, Lord d'Artagnan.' With that he will get there and get back."

"In that case," said Athos, "Planchet must receive seven hundred livres to go, and seven hundred on his return, and Bazin

three hundred to go and three hundred on his return; that will reduce the sum to five thousand livres; we will take each one thousand livres to spend as we like, and we will leave one thousand with the *abbé* in case of emergency. Will that suit?"

"Well, that is agreed," replied Athos. "Planchet and Bazin shall start. On the whole, I am not sorry to keep Grimaud, who is accustomed to my ways. Yesterday shook his nerves, the journey would finish him."

Planchet received his instructions, of which D'Artagnan had already given him notice, announcing, first of all the glory, then the money, then the danger.

"I will carry the letter in the lining of my coat," said Planchet, "and if I am captured, I will swallow it."

"But then you will not be able to accomplish your mission," said D'Artagnan.

"You will give me a copy this evening, and I will learn it by heart."

D'Artagnan looked at his friends, as much as to say:

"Well, what did I promise you?"

"Now," he continued, addressing Planchet, "you have eight days to find Lord de Winter, and eight days to return here. If at eight o'clock on the evening of the sixteenth day you are not here, no money, even if it were only five minutes past the hour."

"Then, sir," said Planchet, "buy me a watch."

"Take this," said Athos, giving him his with thoughtless generosity, "and behave like a gallant fellow. Remember that if you talk, if you gossip, if you loiter, your master, who has such confidence in your fidelity, will lose his head. Remember, also, that if by your fault misfortune befalls D'Artagnan, I will find you, no matter where, to rip you up!"

"Oh, sir!" cried Planchet, humiliated by the suspicion, and frightened by the placid air of the musketeer.

D'Artagnan took his hand and embraced him.

"You see, Planchet," said he, "they speak thus through friendship for me; they love you at heart."

"Ah, sir!" said Planchet, "I shall succeed, or die in the attempt."

It was decided that Planchet would start the next morning, so that he might, during the night, learn the letter by heart.

In the morning, just as he was going to mount his horse, D'Artagnan, who, at the bottom of his heart, had a weakness for the Duke, took Planchet aside.

" Listen," he said ; " when you have given the letter to Lord de Winter, and he has read it, you will say to him, ' Watch over the Duke of Buckingham, for they want to assassinate him.' But this is so serious, Planchet, that I would not own to my friends that I have confided this secret to you, nor would I put it on paper for a captain's commission."

" Never fear, sir," said Planchet ; " you will see that you can count on me."

And mounted upon an excellent horse, Planchet set off at a gallop.

Bazin started the next morning for Tours ; he had eight days to accomplish his mission.

The four friends, during the time that the two valets were absent, were constantly on the look-out.

On the morning of the eighth day Bazin, fresh and smiling, according to his custom, entered the Parpaillot, where the four friends were at breakfast, saying, as had been agreed upon :

" M. Aramis, here is the answer of your cousin."

The four friends exchanged a glance of satisfaction. Half the work was done—it is true that it was the shortest and the easiest.

Aramis, blushing in spite of himself, took the letter, which was ill-written and badly spelt.

" Good gracious ! " he cried, laughing, " decidedly this poor Michon will never write like M. de Voiture."

" What do you mean by poor Michon ? " asked the Swiss, who was talking with the four friends when the letter arrived.

" A charming little laundress that I was greatly in love with," said Aramis, who read the letter and passed it to Athos.

Athos cast an eye over it, and then, to dispel any suspicions which might arise, read aloud as follows :

" My cousin, my sister, and I read dreams very well, and we are very frightened of them ; but as for yours, we shall be able to say, I hope, all dreams are false. Adieu ! take care of your health, and let us hear from you now and then.

" Aglae Michon "

" Of what dream does she speak ? " asked the dragoon, who had approached while Athos was reading.

" A dream I had," said Aramis, " and which I related to her."

" Let us hear the dream," said the Swiss ; " I never dream."

" You are very fortunate," said Athos, rising ; " I wish I could say as much."

D'Artagnan, seeing Athos rise, did the same, took his arm, and left the inn.

Porthos and Aramis remained behind to exchange repartees with the Swiss and the dragoon.

As for Bazin, he lay down on a truss of straw ; and as he had more imagination than the Swiss, he dreamed that Aramis was Pope and made him a cardinal.

The happy return of Bazin had relieved the four friends of only a portion of their anxiety. The days appeared so long that D'Artagnan would have bet that they numbered forty-eight hours. What is more, his confidence in the worthy Picard diminished day by day.

This uneasiness was so great that it extended to Porthos and Aramis. Athos alone remained impassive.

The sixteenth day D'Artagnan and his two friends were so agitated that they could not remain quiet, and wandered like ghosts along the road by which Planchet was expected.

The day passed on, and evening slowly approached. The canteens were filled with tipplers. Athos, who had pocketed his share of the diamond, never left the Parpaillot. He had found in M. de Busigny, who, by the way, had given them a magnificent dinner, an antagonist worthy of him. They were playing then together as usual when seven o'clock struck. They heard the patrols pass on their way to double the posts ; at half-past seven the retreat sounded.

" We are lost men," whispered D'Artagnan to Athos.

" You mean that we have lost," said Athos, pulling four pistoles out of his pocket, and throwing them on the table. " Come, gentlemen," he continued, " the retreat has sounded, let us go to bed."

And Athos left the Parpaillot, followed by D'Artagnan. Aramis marched behind, giving an arm to Porthos. Aramis was muttering poetry, and Porthos, in his despair, was pulling hairs every now and then out of his moustache.

But suddenly in the darkness a shadow was seen, the form of which was familiar to D'Artagnan, and a well-known voice said :

" Sir, I have brought your cloak, as it is chilly this evening."

" Planchet ! " exclaimed D'Artagnan, wild with joy.

" Planchet ! " repeated Aramis and Porthos.

" Why, yes, Planchet," said Athos ; " what is there astonishing in that ? He promised to be here at eight, and eight is striking. Bravo, Planchet ! you are a man of your word ; and if ever you leave your master, I will take you into my service."

"Oh, no! I will never quit M. d'Artagnan," said Planchet.

At the same time D'Artagnan felt that Planchet slipped a note into his hand.

"I have the note," he said to Athos and his friends.

"Good," said Athos; "we will go to our quarters and read it."

The note burned D'Artagnan's hand. He wished to hurry on, but Athos took his arm and restrained him.

They entered their tent, lit a lamp, and while Planchet watched at the door, D'Artagnan, with a trembling hand, broke the seal of this anxiously expected letter.

It contained half a line in thoroughly British handwriting, and of thoroughly Spartan concision:

Thank you; be easy.

Athos took the letter, went up to the lamp, set it on fire, and did not let it go until it was reduced to ashes. Then, calling Planchet:

"Now, my man, you can claim your seven hundred livres, though you did not risk much with such a note as that."

CHAPTER XLVIII

FATALITY

MEANWHILE, Milady, mad with fury, roaring on the deck of the vessel like a lioness, was at first tempted to throw herself into the sea in order to reach the coast, for she could not endure the idea of having been insulted by D'Artagnan and threatened by Athos, and of leaving France without having revenged herself.

She implored the captain to land her; but the captain, anxious to escape from a false situation, placed between the French and English cruisers, obstinately refused to comply with what he considered as the caprice of a woman. As, however, she had been strongly recommended by the Cardinal, the captain promised, if possible, to land her at Brest or Lorient; but, in the meantime, the wind was contrary, the sea bad, they had to beat to windward and to tack about. Only nine days after leaving the Charente, did Milady, pale with grief and anger, see the blue coasts of Finistère.

She calculated that to cross that corner of France and return to

the Cardinal would require three days; add one day for disembarking, that would make thirteen days lost, during which important events might happen in London. She reflected that the Cardinal would be very angry to see her return, and ill-disposed to listen to her complaints; she therefore allowed the vessel to sail past Brest and Lorient without insisting upon being landed. Milady therefore continued her voyage, and on the same day that Planchet embarked at Portsmouth for France the messenger of his Eminence entered the port.

The whole town was in an extraordinary state of excitement; four large vessels recently finished had just been launched. Standing on the jetty, covered with gold, sparkling, as was his custom with diamonds, his hat ornamented with a white plume which fell over his shoulder, Buckingham was to be seen surrounded by a staff almost as brilliant as himself.

As they were going to cast anchor, a small cutter, formidably armed, approached the merchant vessel and lowered a boat. This boat contained an officer and crew. The officer alone went on board, where he was received with all the deference due to his uniform.

After he had talked for a few minutes with the captain, and made him show his papers, all the sailors and passengers were summoned on deck.

The officer then inquired aloud whence the brig had sailed, what course she had taken, and where she had touched. The captain replied without hesitation. Next the officer began a general inspection, and stopping before Milady, examined her carefully, but without saying anything to her.

Then he turned to the captain, said some words to him, and taking command of the vessel, gave an order to the crew, which was instantly obeyed. The merchantman got under weigh again, escorted by the cutter.

During the examination of Milady by the officer, she, on her side, had eagerly scanned him. But accustomed though she was to read secrets in the hearts of others with her eyes of flame, she found this time a face so impassive that she could discover nothing.

The officer who had paused in front of her, and had silently studied her with so much care, was about twenty-five years of age, with a white face and light blue eyes, deeply set; his lips, thin and well cut, remained motionless; his chin, which was prominent, denoted that strength of character which in the common British type is a sign of obstinacy; a rather receding

forehead, suitable to poets, enthusiasts, and soldiers, was shaded slightly by short, thin hair, of a deep brown.

When they entered the harbour it was already night. The mist increased the darkness, and formed, round the beacons and the lanterns along the jetty, a halo like that which surrounds the moon when it threatens rain. The air one breathed was damp, and cold, and depressing.

Milady shivered in spite of herself. The officer had her trunks pointed out to him, had them conveyed to the boat, and this operation having been completed, invited her to descend herself, giving her his hand.

Milady looked at this man and hesitated.

"Who are you, sir," she asked, "who take such special interest in me?"

"You can see, madam, by my uniform, that I am an officer of the English navy."

"But is it the custom for officers of the English navy to place themselves at the orders of their countrywomen when they reach a harbour in Great Britain, and do they carry their attentions so far as to take them on shore?"

"Yes, madam, it is the custom, not out of chivalry, but out of prudence. All foreigners are taken to some particular hostel, so that they may remain under the supervision of the Government until information has been obtained respecting them."

These words were pronounced with the most scrupulous politeness and the most perfect calm. They did not, however, have the effect of convincing Milady.

"But I am not a foreigner, sir," she said, with an accent as pure as ever was heard between Portsmouth and Manchester; "my name is Lady Clarick, and this measure——"

"This measure is general, my lady, and you will attempt in vain to elude it."

"I will follow you then, sir."

And accepting the hand of the officer, she began to descend the ladder, at the foot of which the boat was waiting. The officer followed her, and took his place beside her.

"Pull away!" he said to the sailors.

The eight oars touched the sea together, and the boat darted forward on the surface of the water.

In five minutes land was reached; the officer jumped ashore and offered his hand to Milady. A carriage was waiting.

"Is this carriage for us?" asked Milady.

"Yes, madam," replied the officer.

"The hostel is then a long way off?"

"At the other end of the town."

Milady stepped boldly into the carriage.

The officer saw that the trunks were carefully put up behind, and he then seated himself next to Milady and shut the door.

Immediately, without any order having been given, the coachman set off at a gallop and plunged into the streets of the town.

So strange a reception furnished Milady with ample food for reflection; therefore, seeing that the young officer did not seem inclined to open a conversation, she leaned back in a corner and passed in review the various suppositions which suggested themselves to her mind.

However, at the end of a quarter of an hour, astonished at the length of the road, she looked out of the window, to see where they were going. She no longer saw any houses, and the trees appeared in the darkness like great black phantoms running after each other. Milady shivered.

"But we are no longer in the town, sir," she said.

The young officer remained silent.

"I will not go any further, unless you tell me where you are taking me: I warn you of that, sir."

This threat did not elicit any answer.

"Oh, this is too much!" cried Milady. "Help! help!"

No voice replied to hers: the carriage rolled rapidly along; the officer resembled a statue.

Milady looked at him with one of those terrible expressions peculiar to her face, and which rarely failed in their effect: rage made her eyes flash in the darkness.

The young man remained impassive.

Milady tried to open the door and to jump out.

"Take care," said the officer coldly, "you will be killed if you jump."

Milady sat down again, foaming.

The officer leaned forward in his turn, and seemed surprised to see this face, lately so beautiful, distorted by passion and become almost hideous. The artful creature understood that she was injuring herself by showing her soul, so she relaxed her features and said, in a plaintive voice:

"In the name of Heaven! sir, tell me if it is to you, to your Government, or to an enemy, that I am to attribute the violence which is done to me?"

"No one does you violence, madam, and what happens to you

is the result of a measure which we are obliged to adopt toward all persons landing in England."

"Then you do not know me, sir?"

"This is the first time that I have had the honour to see you."

"And, on your honour, you have no reason to hate me?"

"None, I assure you."

There was so much serenity, coolness, and even gentleness in the voice of the young man, that Milady felt reassured.

At last, after about an hour's drive, the carriage stopped in front of an iron gate leading to a massive and isolated building. As the wheels rolled over the fine gravel, Milady heard a sort of moaning noise which she recognized as that of the sea breaking against the cliffs.

The carriage passed under two gateways and then drew up in a dark, square courtyard; the door of the carriage was opened, the young man jumped out, presented his hand to Milady, who leaned upon it, and in her turn alighted.

"It would appear," said Milady, with a gracious smile, looking round her, and then concentrating her gaze on the young officer, "that I am a prisoner; but I am sure that it will not be for long," she added; "my conscience and your politeness guarantee that."

To this flattering compliment, the officer answered nothing, but drawing from his belt a little silver whistle, he whistled three times. Several men appeared, unharnessed the steaming horses, and put the vehicle in the coach-house.

Then the officer, with the same tranquil politeness, invited his prisoner to enter.

Milady, with a smiling face, took his arm and passed through a low door which led to a winding staircase, at the top of which was a massive door, which the young man unlocked and which opened into a chamber destined for Milady.

At a single glance the prisoner took in the apartment in its smallest details.

It was a chamber the furniture of which was suitable both for a prison and for an abode of the free; however, the bars at the windows and the bolts outside the door pointed to it being a prison.

For a moment all the force of mind of this creature abandoned her; she fell into an armchair, crossing her arms, bowing her head, and expecting at every moment to see a judge enter to interrogate her.

But no one entered except two or three marines, who brought

in her trunks, placed them in a corner, and then withdrew without a word.

The officer presided over these details with the same calm, as Milady had constantly remarked, not pronouncing a word, and causing himself to be obeyed by a sign or a whistle.

At length Milady could restrain herself no longer.

" In the name of Heaven ! sir," she cried, " what does all this mean ? Satisfy my doubt. Where am I, and what am I here ? Am I free ? Why these bars and these doors ? Am I a prisoner ? and what crime have I committed ? "

" You are here in the apartment which is destined for you, madam. I was ordered to bring you to this place, and I have accomplished my task with the rigidity of a soldier, but with the courtesy of a gentleman. Here ends for the present my duty with regard to you ; the rest concerns another person."

" And this other person, who is he ? " asked Milady.

At this moment the noise of spurs was heard on the stairs, and the sound of voices, which passed and died away ; then some one approached the door.

" The other person, here he is," said the officer, unmasking the entrance and falling back in an attitude of respect.

At the same time the door opened, and a man appeared on the threshold. He had no hat, wore a sword, and crumpled a handkerchief in his hand. The stranger advanced slowly, and as he came within the circle of light thrown by the lamp Milady recoiled involuntarily.

" What ! my brother ! " she cried, in the height of her amazement. " Is that you ? "

" Yes, fair lady," replied Lord de Winter, making a bow, half courteous, half ironical ; " myself."

" But this castle ? "

" Is mine."

" Then I am your prisoner ? "

" More or less."

" But this is a fearful abuse of power ! "

" No fine phrases ; let us sit down and talk quietly, as brother and sister should do."

Then, turning to the door, and seeing that the young officer was waiting for his last orders :

" That will do," he said, " I thank you. You may leave us now, Mr Felton."

CHAPTER XLIX

A CHAT BETWEEN BROTHER AND SISTER

DURING the time that Lord de Winter was closing the door, pushing to the shutters, and drawing a seat close to the arm-chair of his sister-in-law, Milady thought hard, and began to understand the events which she had been unable to fathom so long as she did not know into whose hands she had fallen. She knew her brother-in-law to be a perfect gentleman, a good sportsman, a bold player, enterprising with women, but below the average as regards intrigue.

" Yes, let us talk, brother," she said, in a playful manner, determined as she was, in spite of all the dissimulation which Lord de Winter might employ, to derive a sufficient amount of information from their conversation to guide her future conduct.

" You have, then, made up your mind to return to England," said Lord de Winter, " in spite of the resolve you manifested in Paris, never to set foot again on British territory ? "

Milady answered this question by another.

" First of all," she said, " tell me why you had me so closely watched that you were warned beforehand, not only of my arrival, but of the day, the hour, and the port at which I should arrive ? "

Lord de Winter adopted the same tactics as Milady, thinking that as his sister employed them they must be good.

" But tell me yourself, my dear sister, what you have come to do in England."

" Why ! I came to see you," replied Milady, without knowing how, by this answer, she aggravated the suspicions which the letter of D'Artagnan had aroused in the mind of her brother-in-law, and wishing to gain his goodwill by a falsehood.

" Ah ! to see me ? " said Lord de Winter cunningly.

" No doubt. What is there astonishing in that ? "

" Of a truth ! what affection, sister ! "

" But am I not your nearest relation ? " asked Milady, in a tone of touching simplicity.

" And the heiress to my worldly goods," said Lord de Winter, fixing his eyes on Milady.

In spite of her self-control, Milady could not help starting, and as in uttering these last words Lord de Winter had placed his hand upon his sister's arm, this movement did not escape him.

Indeed, the blow went straight home.

" I do not understand, my lord," she said, in order to gain time,

and to get her adversary to speak. "What are you saying, and do your words conceal some hidden meaning?"

"Not at all," said Lord de Winter, with apparent good nature; "you desire to see me, and you come to England. I hear of this desire, and in order to spare you all the fatigue of disembarking at night, I send one of my officers to meet you, I place a carriage at your orders, and it brings you to this castle, of which I am the Governor, where I come every day, and where, to satisfy our joint desire of seeing each other, I had a room prepared for you. What is there more astonishing in what I have told you, than in what you have told me?"

Milady understood that Lord de Winter was not speaking the truth, and she was all the more frightened.

"Brother," she continued, "was it not the Duke of Buckingham whom I saw on the jetty, on arriving?"

"Himself. Ah! I understand that you were struck by the sight of him. You come from a country which must be taking a great interest in him, and I know that these armaments against France sorely trouble your friend the Cardinal."

"My friend the Cardinal!" cried Milady, on finding that upon this head, also, Lord de Winter was well informed.

"Is he not then your friend?" resumed carelessly the Baron. "I beg your pardon, I thought that he was. But we will return to him later; do not let us wander from the sentimental turn which our conversation had taken: you came, you were saying, to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I reply that you shall have your wish gratified, and that you shall see me every day."

"Then I am to remain eternally here?" asked Milady anxiously.

"Do you find yourself badly lodged, sister? Ask for what you require, and I will have it given to you."

"But I have neither my maid nor my men-servants."

"You shall have all that, madam; let me know upon what footing you lived with your first husband, and I shall do as well by you."

"My first husband!" exclaimed Milady, looking at Lord de Winter with haggard eyes.

"Yes, your French husband; I am not speaking of my brother. Besides, if you have forgotten him, as he is still alive, I can write to him, and he will furnish me with information on this subject."

A cold sweat broke out on Milady's brow.

"You are laughing," said she in a low voice.

"Do I look like it?" said the Baron, rising, and stepping backwards.

"Or, rather, you insult me!" she said, clutching the arms of her chair, and lifting herself up with her wrists.

"Insult you, I!" said Lord de Winter, with contempt. "In truth, madam, do you believe that possible?"

"In truth, sir, you are either drunk or mad. Leave the room, and send me a maid!"

"Women are very indiscreet, sister; may I not serve you as lady's-maid? in this way our secrets will remain in the family."

"Insolent!" cried Milady, and as if moved by a spring, she leapt at the Baron, who awaited her with folded arms, but with a hand on the hilt of his sword.

"I know," he said, "that you are in the habit of assassinating people, but I shall defend myself, even against you."

"Oh! you are right," said Milady; "you are coward enough to lay hands on a woman."

"Perhaps; besides, I should have an excuse: my hand, I presume, would not be the first man's hand laid upon you."

And the Baron indicated, by a slow and accusing gesture, the left shoulder of Milady, which he almost touched with his finger.

Milady uttered a hollow roar, and crouched into the corner of the room like a panther preparing to spring.

"Oh! roar as much as you like," said Lord de Winter, "but do not attempt to bite. We have no procurators here to settle inheritances beforehand, no knights-errant to do battle with me because I detain a fair lady prisoner; but I have judges at hand who will dispose of a woman shameless enough to worm her way through bigamy into the bed of my eldest brother, judges who will send you to an executioner to have both shoulders marked alike."

The eyes of Milady darted such fire that, although he was a man and armed, and she was a woman and disarmed, he felt a chilly sensation of fear invade his very soul. He none the less continued, with increasing vehemence:

"Yes, I understand that after having inherited the fortune of my brother, it would have been agreeable to you to have inherited mine. But, know beforehand that you may kill me or have me killed, my precautions are taken; not a penny that I possess will pass into your hands. In a fortnight I shall start for La Rochelle

with the army ; but on the eve of my departure, a vessel will come and take you to one of our southern colonies, and be assured that I will give you a companion who will blow out your brains on your first attempt to return to England or to the Continent."

Milady listened with an attention which dilated her flaming eyes.

" At present you will remain in this castle," said Lord de Winter ; " the walls are thick, the doors are strong, the bars are massive ; it is a straight drop from your window to the sea ; you are strictly guarded, and orders have been given to fire on you should you attempt to escape. The officer who commands here in my absence, you have seen and know already ; he knows how to obey an order, as you have seen. On the way from Portsmouth you tried to make him speak ; could a statue have been more mute ? You have tried your seductions upon a great many men, and you have, unfortunately, always succeeded. Try them upon this man, and if you succeed, I will pronounce you to be the Devil himself ! "

He went toward the door and threw it open.

" Call Mr Felton," he said. " Wait a minute, and I will commend you to him."

The officer entered.

" Now," said the Baron, " look at this woman : she will attempt to seduce you ; she will perhaps try to kill you. I drew you from poverty, Felton, I made you a lieutenant, I saved your life once. This woman came to England to conspire against my life. Swear upon your hope of salvation to keep her safely for the chastisement she has deserved."

" My lord," said the young officer, " I swear to do all you desire."

It was impossible to see a face more submissive and sweet than that of Milady at this moment. Lord de Winter himself had some difficulty in recognizing the tigress with whom a few minutes before he was preparing to fight.

" She must never leave this room, John," continued the Baron ; " she must correspond with no one ; she must speak to no one but to you, should you do her the honour to address her."

" That is enough, my lord ; I have sworn."

" And now, madam, try and make your peace with God, for you are condemned by men."

Milady let fall her head as if she had been overwhelmed by this sentence. Lord de Winter left the room, making a sign to Felton, who followed him.

The next moment was to be heard in the gallery the heavy step of a marine doing sentry duty, his axe in his belt, and his musket in his hand.

Milady remained motionless for some minutes, thinking that she might be watched. Then she slowly raised her head.

Her face had assumed a formidable expression of menace and defiance. She ran to listen at the door, to look out of the window, then returned and sank into a large armchair, where she gave herself up to thought.

CHAPTER L

"OFFICER!"

THE Cardinal was waiting for news from England; but no news arrived but what was bad and threatening.

Time slipped by, and the Rochelais did not surrender. The last spy who had been taken was the bearer of a letter which told Buckingham that the city was *in extremis*, but instead of adding, "If succour does not arrive in a fortnight we shall surrender," it added simply, "If succour does not arrive before a fortnight, we shall be all dead of hunger when it comes."

The Rochelais had therefore no hope but in Buckingham. It was evident that, if they should learn some day that they could no longer count upon him, their courage would fail them.

He awaited, therefore, with great impatience, news from England announcing that Buckingham would not come.

The Cardinal could not divest his mind of the fear inspired by his terrible emissary, for he also had understood the strange composition of this woman—sometimes serpent, sometimes lion. Had she betrayed him? Was she dead? He knew her sufficiently well to be sure that, acting for or against him, as friend or foe, she would not remain idle unless by force of circumstances.

One day, in deep dejection, having lost hope in the negotiations with the city, without news from England, the Cardinal had gone out without any other object than to go out, accompanied only by Cahusac and La Houdinière, and was wandering along the shore, when he saw seven men lying on the sand, surrounded by empty bottles.

Four of these men were our musketeers, who were preparing to listen to a letter which one of them had just received.

This letter was so important that it had made them abandon their cards and dice on a drumhead.

The three others were engaged in opening a large jar of wine. These were the lackeys.

The Cardinal, as we said, was in a bad temper, and when he was in this state of mind, nothing redoubled his ill-humour like the gaiety of others.

He was in the habit of supposing, too, that his sadness was a source of gaiety to other people.

Making a sign to Cahusac and to La Houdinière to pull up, he dismounted and approached these suspicious revellers, hoping, with the aid of the sand, which deadened the sound of his footsteps, and the hedge, which concealed him, that he might catch a few words of this conversation which appeared to be so interesting.

At ten paces from the hedge he recognized the talkative Gascon, and, as he knew that these men were musketeers, he did not doubt that the three others were Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

It may be imagined how his desire to overhear the conversation increased with this discovery. His eyes assumed a curious expression, and with the stealthy step of a tiger-cat he approached the hedge. But he had been able to catch only a few vague syllables, when a brief and sonorous cry made him start, and attracted the attention of the musketeers.

" Officer ! " shouted Grimaud.

" You speak, I think, rascal ! " said Athos, raising himself up on his elbow and glaring at Grimaud.

Grimaud said nothing more, but pointed to the hedge in the direction of the Cardinal and his escort.

The four musketeers sprang to their feet and saluted.

The Cardinal seemed furious.

" It appears that the gentlemen of the Musketeers are guarded," he said. " Are the English expected by land, or do the Musketeers look upon themselves as superior officers ? "

" Monseigneur," replied Athos, for in the midst of the general terror he alone had preserved that dignified calm which never deserted him. " Monseigneur, the Musketeers when they are not on duty drink and play at dice, and they are very superior officers for their lackeys."

" Their lackeys ! " grumbled the Cardinal. " Lackeys who have orders to warn their masters when anyone passes—they are not lackeys, but sentinels."

" Your Eminence will perceive, that if we had not adopted this precaution, we should have been exposed to allow him to pass without presenting him our respects, and offering him our thanks

for uniting us. Let your Eminence be persuaded," added D'Artagnan, " that we would have gone to meet you, had we been able to suppose that it was you who were coming with so small an escort."

The Cardinal bit his moustache and even his lip.

" Do you know what you resemble, always together, always armed, and guarded by your lackeys ? You resemble four conspirators," said the Cardinal.

" Oh ! as for that, Monseigneur, it is true that we conspire, as your Eminence saw the other day, but only against the Rochelais."

" Eh, gentlemen politicians ! " rejoined the Cardinal, with a frown, " one might perhaps find in your brains the secret of many things which are unknown, if one could read in them as you were reading in that letter which you hid at my approach."

The colour mounted to the face of Athos, who took a step toward his Eminence.

" One might suppose that you really suspect us, Monseigneur, and that we are undergoing a regular examination ; if this be the case, perhaps your Eminence will deign to explain yourself, so that we may know exactly how we stand."

" And if it were an examination," said the Cardinal, " others besides you, M. Athos, have undergone them and have answered."

" Monseigneur, I have told your Eminence that you have only to question us and we will reply."

" What is that letter which you were going to read, M. Aramis, and which you hid away ? "

" A letter from a lady, Monseigneur."

" Oh ! I conceive," said the Cardinal, " that one must be discreet with regard to such letters ; yet you can show them to a confessor, and you know that I have taken orders."

" Monseigneur," said Athos, with a calm all the more terrible because he knew that he was risking his head, " the letter is from a lady, but it is signed neither by Marion de Lorme nor by Madame d'Aiguillon."

The Cardinal grew as pale as death ; his eyes gleamed like those of a wild animal ; he turned round as if to give an order to Cahusac and La Houdinière.

Athos saw the movement, and took a step toward the muskets, upon which the three friends had their eyes fixed like men ill-disposed to allow themselves to be arrested.

The Cardinal and his friends were three, the musketeers and their lackeys seven ; he deemed that the game would be all the

less equal if Athos and his companions were really conspiring ; and by one of those rapid changes which he always held at his disposal, all his anger melted away into a smile.

" Come, come ! " he said, " you are brave young fellows, proud in the sunlight, faithful in the dark ; there is no harm in watching over yourselves when you watch over others so well. Gentlemen, I have not forgotten the night when you escorted me to the Colombier Rouge ; if there were any danger on the road I am about to follow I would beg you to accompany me ; but as there is not, remain where you are, and finish your bottles, your game, and your letter. Adieu, gentlemen ! "

And remounting his horse, which Cahusac had brought up, he saluted with his hand, and rode away.

The four young men, standing and motionless, followed him with their eyes without saying a word until he had disappeared. Then they looked at each other.

Consternation was in every face, for, notwithstanding the friendly adieu of his Eminence, they understood that the Cardinal had ridden away angry at heart.

Athos alone smiled a disdainful smile. When the Cardinal was out of hearing and out of sight :

" That Grimaud was late in warning us," said Porthos, anxious to visit his bad humour on some one.

Grimaud was about to excuse himself ; Athos raised his finger, and Grimaud was silent.

" Would you have given up the letter, Aramis ? " said D'Artagnan.

" I ! " said Aramis, in his most delicate voice. " I had made up my mind, if he had insisted upon having the letter, to present it to him with one hand and to run him through with the other."

" I expected as much," said Athos ; " this is why I threw myself between you. In truth, this man is very imprudent to speak thus to other men ; one would think that he had had to deal only with women and children."

" Let us speak no more of what has passed, and let Aramis resume the reading of his cousin's letter, interrupted by the Cardinal."

Aramis drew out the letter, which ran thus :

" My dear Cousin,

" I think that I shall leave for Stenay, where my sister has placed her little servant in the convent of the Carmelites ; the poor

child is resigned, knowing that she cannot live anywhere else without endangering her salvation. However, should our family affairs be settled in accordance with our desire, I think she will run the risk of damnation, and that she will return to those who regret her, all the more because she knows that they do not forget her. In the meanwhile, she is not too unhappy. All that she desires is a letter from her intended. I know that goods of this description pass with difficulty through convent gates; but, after all, as I have proved to you, my dear cousin, I am not unskilled in these affairs, and I will undertake the commission. My sister thanks you for your good wishes. She was very uneasy for a moment, but she is quite reassured now, having sent her clerk yonder, so that nothing untoward may happen.

"Adieu, my dear cousin. Send me news of yourself as often as you can. I embrace you.

"MARIE MICHON"

"Oh, what do I not owe you, Aramis?" cried D'Artagnan. "Dear Constance, at last I have news of her! She lives, she is in safety in a convent, she is at Stenay. Where is Stenay, Athos?"

"A few leagues from the Alsace frontier; once the siege is over, we might take a trip in that direction. But what the devil are you doing, Aramis? You are putting that letter in your pocket!"

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "Athos is right; you must burn it—not once, but twice. Who knows whether the Cardinal has not some secret for interrogating ashes."

"Come here, Grimaud," said Athos.

Grimaud rose and obeyed.

"To punish you for having spoken without permission, my friend, you must swallow that piece of paper; then, by way of reward, you shall have a glass of wine. Here is the letter; chew it up well."

Grimaud smiled, and with his eyes fixed on the glass which Athos held in his hand, he chewed the paper and swallowed it.

"Bravo, Grimaud!" said Athos; "and now take this."

Grimaud swallowed the wine in silence, raising his eyes to heaven.

"And now," said Athos, "unless the Cardinal should have the ingenious idea of ripping Grimaud open, I think our minds may be easy."

During this time his Eminence continued his melancholy ride, muttering in his moustaches:

"Decidedly, those four men must enter my service."

CHAPTER LI

THE FIRST DAY OF CAPTIVITY

LET us return to Milady, whom we have lost sight of for a moment.

For the first time she has lost confidence, for the first time she fears.

Upon two occasions her star failed her; upon two occasions she was discovered and betrayed; on these two occasions she has no doubt had the Lord against her, and she was defeated by D'Artagnan!

He alone could have sent to Lord de Winter all the terrible secrets which he had discovered one after the other. He knew her brother-in-law, and must have written to him.

The first moments of her captivity were terrible; some convulsions of rage, which she was unable to conquer, paid her debt of womanly weakness to nature. But by degrees she subdued these outbursts of fury, the nervous trembling which agitated her body was stilled, and she coiled herself up, as it were, like a serpent which is fatigued and stands in need of repose.

Then, to see to what extent she could change her expressive physiognomy, she made it assume all kinds of feelings, from rage, which distorted her features, to the most sweet, the most affectionate, the most seductive smile. Then with her skilful fingers she gave such undulations to her hair, as she thought capable of adding to the charms of her face.

At last she murmured, satisfied with herself:

"Come, nothing is lost; I am still beautiful."

It was nearly eight in the evening.

Milady noticed a bed; she reflected that some hours of rest would refresh not only her mind but her complexion.

However, before going to bed, she had a better idea.

She had heard something about supper. She had been for an hour in her room; they would bring her repast before long.

The prisoner did not wish to lose any time, and she resolved to make that very evening an attempt to feel the ground, to study the characters of those to whose care she had been committed.

A light appeared under the door.

Milady, who had risen, sank into her armchair, her head thrown back, her splendid hair unbound, her bosom half naked beneath her crumpled lace, one hand on her heart, and the other hanging down by her side.

The bolts were drawn, the door creaked on its hinges, and steps were heard approaching.

" Place the table there," said a voice which Milady recognized as Felton's.

The order was executed.

" You will bring lights, and you will relieve the sentry," continued Felton.

This double order proved to Milady that her servants and warders were soldiers.

The orders were executed with a silent rapidity which gave a good idea of the state of discipline that was maintained.

At last Felton, who had not before looked at Milady, turned round.

" Ah ! " he said, " she is asleep ; she will sup when she awakes."

And he was about to leave the room.

" But, sir," said a soldier, who had approached Milady, " this woman is not asleep."

" How, she is not asleep ! What is she doing, then ? "

" She has fainted ; her face is very pale, and listen as I will, I cannot hear her breathe."

" You are right," said Felton, after looking at Milady. " Go and inform Lord de Winter that his prisoner has fainted, for this not having been foreseen, I know not how to act."

The soldier left the room to obey the orders of his officer.

Felton seated himself on a chair near the door, and waited without saying a word, without making a gesture.

Milady possessed the great art, so much studied by women, of seeing between her long eyelashes without opening her eyelids. She saw Felton, whose back was turned to her ; she continued to look at him for about ten minutes, during which time the impassive warder did not once turn round.

She then reflected that Lord de Winter would soon arrive, and by his presence lend fresh strength to her jailer.

Her first effort had been a failure, and she consoled herself like a woman confident in her resources. So now she raised her head, opened her eyes, and sighed gently.

At this sigh Felton at last turned round.

" Ah ! you are awake, madam," he said ; " then I have no longer any business here. If you require anything you will ring."

" Oh, my God ! my God ! how I have suffered ! " murmured Milady in that harmonious voice which, like those of the enchantresses of old, charmed those whom she wished to ruin.

And raising herself up in her armchair she assumed a position even more graceful and abandoned than when she had reclined.

Felton stood up.

" You will be served three times a day, madam," he said : " at nine in the morning, at one o'clock, and at eight in the evening. If those hours do not suit you, you can change them."

" But am I going to remain always alone in this large and gloomy chamber ? " asked Milady.

" A woman of the neighbourhood will be here to-morrow, and will come whenever you desire her presence."

" I thank you, sir," humbly replied the prisoner.

Felton made a slight bow and went toward the door.

As he was about to leave, Lord de Winter appeared, followed by the soldier who had informed him that Milady had fainted.

" Well, what is this ? What has happened ? " he said in a bantering tone, seeing the prisoner on her feet and Felton about to leave. " Has she come to life again ? *Pardieu !* Felton, my lad, didn't you see that she took you for a greenhorn, and that this is the first act in a comedy, all the developments of which we shall no doubt have the honour of following."

" I thought so, my lord," said Felton ; " but as the prisoner is a woman, I wished to treat her as a gentleman born should, if not for her sake, at least for his own."

A shudder ran through the body of Milady.

" So," resumed Lord de Winter, laughing, " those beautiful locks so skilfully displayed, this white skin, these languishing looks, have not yet seduced you, heart of stone ? "

" No, my lord ; believe me, it requires more than the artifices of a woman to corrupt me."

" In that case, my good lieutenant, let us leave Milady to think out some other means, and let us go to supper. Take my word for it, she has a fertile imagination, and the second act of the comedy will soon follow the first."

At these words Lord de Winter took Felton's arm and led him away laughing.

" Oh ! I will find your weak spot," murmured Milady between her teeth ; " poor spoiled monk, poor converted soldier, who have cut your uniform out of a cowl ! "

" *A propos,*" said De Winter, stopping at the door, " this little defeat, Milady, must not take away your appetite. Taste that chicken, and these fish, which, on my honour, have not been

poisoned. I am very well satisfied with my cook, and as he is not my heir, I have full confidence in him. Farewell, dear sister, until your next fainting fit."

Milady could bear no more; she clasped the armchair in her hands, she ground her teeth, and when she was alone once more she gave way to a fresh fit of despair; she cast her eyes on the table, where she saw a knife glittering; she sprang upon it and seized it; but her disappointment was cruel: the blade was rounded off and of silver.

A peal of laughter re-echoed behind the half-closed door, which Lord de Winter reopened.

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed he, "see what I told you; that knife was for you; she would have killed you; it is one of her little failings to get rid of people who are in her way, by some means or another. If I had listened to you, this knife would have been of steel and pointed: then, no more Felton! Do you notice, John, how well she handles a knife?"

Indeed, Milady still clutched the weapon in her hand, but these last words, this supreme insult, completely unnerved her.

The knife fell from her hand.

"You are right, my lord," said Felton, with an accent of profound disgust, which went to Milady's heart; "you are right, and it was I who was wrong."

And they both left the room again.

But this time Milady listened more attentively than before, and heard the noise of their steps die away in the corridor.

Milady sat down at the table, partook of several dishes, drank a little Spanish wine, and felt all her courage return.

Before going to bed she had commented upon, analysed, and carefully examined every word and gesture of her warders, and after a deep and skilful study she had come to the conclusion that Felton was the more vulnerable of her two persecutors.

One sentence especially recurred to the mind of the prisoner.

"If I had listened to you——" Lord de Winter had said.

Then Felton had spoken in her favour. "Feeble or strong," repeated Milady, "there is a gleam of pity in that heart; of that gleam I will make a conflagration which shall devour him. As for the other, he knows and fears me, and is aware what he may expect, should I ever escape out of his hands. But with Felton it is another affair; he is a simple-minded young man who seems pure and virtuous. There are means of corrupting him."

And Milady went to bed and fell asleep with a smile on her lips. Anyone who had seen her asleep would have thought that she was

a young girl dreaming of flowers with which she was to deck her brow at her next *fête*.

CHAPTER LII

THE SECOND DAY OF CAPTIVITY

ON entering her room in the morning, they brought her breakfast; she thought that they would soon return to clear away, and that she would then see Felton.

Milady was not mistaken: Felton reappeared, and without noticing whether Milady had or had not touched her repast, he made a sign for the table to be removed. Felton remained the last, he held a book in his hand.

Milady, lying in an armchair near the fireplace, beautiful, pale, and resigned, looked like a virgin awaiting martyrdom. Felton approached her and said:

"Lord de Winter, who is a Catholic like you, madam, thinks that the privation of the rites and ceremonies of your religion may be painful to you; he therefore consents that you should read *your mass*, and here is a book which contains the ritual."

Owing to the manner in which Felton laid this book on the table near Milady, the tone in which he pronounced "*your mass*," and the smile of contempt with which the words were accompanied, Milady raised her head and looked attentively at the officer.

Then, by the manner in which the hair was cut, by that costume of exaggerated simplicity, by that brow polished like marble, and as hard and impenetrable, she recognized one of those gloomy Puritans whom she had so often met at the Court of King James, or at that of the King of France, where, in spite of the recollection of the St Bartholomew, they sometimes sought refuge.

She had one of those sudden inspirations which people of genius alone receive in those great crises which decide their fortune or their life.

Those words, "*your mass*," and a simple glance thrown at Felton, had shown her the importance of the answer she was about to make. With that rapid intelligence so peculiar to her, that reply, however, came at once to her lips:

"I!" she said, with an accent of contempt; "*my mass*, sir? Lord de Winter, that corrupt Catholic, knows well that I do not belong to his religion, and it is a snare that he sets for me."

"Of what religion are you then, madam?" asked Felton, with astonishment.

"I will tell you," cried Milady, with feigned exultation, "on the day when I shall have suffered sufficiently for my faith."

Felton's look revealed to Milady the full effect of these words. However, the young officer remained mute and motionless; his eyes alone had spoken.

"I am in the hands of my enemies," she said, in a tone of enthusiasm which she knew to be familiar to the Puritans. "Well, let my God save me, or may I perish for my God! That is the answer which I beg you will make to Lord de Winter. And as for that book," she added, pointing to the ritual, but without touching it, "you can take it away and make use of it yourself, for no doubt you are doubly the accomplice of Lord de Winter, the accomplice of his persecution, the accomplice of his heresy."

Felton did not reply; he took up the book with the same feeling of repugnance which he had already manifested, and retired pensively.

Lord de Winter came about five in the evening; Milady had had time during the day to elaborate her plans; she received him as a woman who had already recovered all her advantages.

"It appears," said the Baron, seating himself in an armchair opposite to Milady, and listlessly stretching out his legs, "that you have been guilty of a little apostasy."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean that since the last time we met you have changed your religion. Have you, by chance, taken a third husband who is a Protestant?"

"Explain yourself, my lord," replied the prisoner with dignity, 'for I hear your words without understanding them."

"Then you have no religion at all? I like that better," said Lord de Winter, with a sneer.

"It is certain that that would be in accordance with your principles."

"Oh! I acknowledge that it is perfectly indifferent to me."

"Even were you not to admit this indifference to religion, your debaucheries and your crimes would betray it."

"What! you speak of debaucheries, you Messalina, you Lady Macbeth! Either I did not hear you rightly, or you are very impudent."

"You speak thus because you know that we are overheard, sir," replied Milady coldly; "and that you wish to prejudice your jailers and your executioners against me."

"My jailers, my executioners! Phew! madam, you take a

very poetic view of matters, and the comedy of last night is turned into tragedy this evening. But there ! within a week you will be where you ought to be, and my task will be over."

" An infamous task ! an impious task ! " cried Milady, with the exaltation of a victim defying his judge.

" I believe, on my word, that the jade has gone mad. Come, come, calm yourself, my Puritan lady, or I will put you in a cell. It is my Spanish wine which has got into your head, is it not ? But never mind : that intoxication is not dangerous, and will have no ill consequences."

And Lord de Winter withdrew swearing, which at that period was quite a cavalier-like custom.

Felton, who in fact was behind the door, had not lost a word of the conversation.

Milady had guessed right.

" Yes, go, go," said she to her brother ; the consequences are drawing nigh, on the contrary, but you will not perceive them, fool, until you are no longer able to avoid them."

There was silence once more ; two hours passed by ; they brought in the supper and found Milady praying aloud—prayers which she had learnt from an old servant of her second husband, a most austere Puritan. She appeared to be in an ecstasy, and seemed to pay no attention to what was passing around her. Felton made a sign that she was not to be disturbed, and, when everything was ready, he and the soldiers silently left the room.

Milady, knowing that she might be watched, continued her prayers to the end, and it seemed to her that the sentry at the door was listening.

For the moment she asked for nothing better ; she rose, ate little, and drank nothing but water.

An hour later, they came to clear the table, but Milady observed that this time Felton did not accompany the soldiers.

He was evidently afraid of seeing her too often.

She turned to the wall to smile, for there was in that smile such an expression of triumph, that it would have betrayed her.

She allowed half an hour to pass away. As everything was then silent in the castle, and she heard only the eternal murmur of the tide, that immense breath of the ocean, with her pure, strong, and harmonious voice she sang the first couplet of a psalm then in great favour among the Puritans.

While singing, Milady listened : the soldier on guard had halted as if turned into stone. Milady was able to judge of the effect she

had produced. She therefore continued with inexpressible feeling and fervour.

Her voice, with its great range and its sublime passion, gave to the rude and uncultured poetry of these psalms a magic and an expression which the Puritans rarely found in the hymns of their brethren.

Milady continued :

> " The day of our deliverance tarrieth,
> But Thou, our God, are ever strong and just,
> And though it fail, our everlasting trust
> Remains in Thee, through martyrdom and death."

This verse, into which the terrible enchantress flung her whole soul, completed the perturbation in the heart of the young officer ; he suddenly opened the door, and Milady saw him appear, pale as usual, but with wild and haggard eyes.

" Why do you sing thus ? " he asked, " and with such a voice ? "

" I beg your pardon, sir," said Milady sweetly, " I forgot that my hymns are out of place in this house. I have perhaps offended your faith, but it was without evil intent, I swear ; forgive me, then, a fault which may have been great, but which was involuntary."

Milady was so beautiful at this moment, that Felton, dazzled, thought that he beheld the angel which a short time before he believed he had heard.

" Yes, yes," he replied ; " you disturb, you agitate the people in the castle."

And the poor fool did not notice the incoherence of his own words, while Milady plunged her lynx-like eye into the depth of his heart.

" I will be silent," said Milady, lowering her eyes with a movement full of resignation.

" No, no, madam," said Felton ; " only do not sing so loud, especially during the night."

After these words, Felton, finding that he could no longer treat his prisoner with severity, darted from the room.

" You were right, sir," said a soldier. " Those hymns disturb the soul. Yet one gets accustomed to them, her voice is so beautiful."

CHAPTER LIII

THE THIRD DAY OF CAPTIVITY

FELTON had come; but there was still a step to take; he must be detained, or rather, he must be induced to remain of his own accord.

In the morning Felton came according to custom; but Milady allowed him to preside over all the preparations for breakfast without addressing a word to him. When he was about to retire, she had a gleam of hope; she thought that he was going to speak; but his lips moved without any sound coming from his mouth; the words which were about to escape him were thrust back into his heart, and he left the room.

Toward noon Lord de Winter entered.

It was a fine winter's day, and a ray of that pale English sun which lights, but does not heat, passed through the prison bars.

Milady was looking out of the window, and pretended not to hear the door opened.

"Ah, ah!" said Lord de Winter; "after comedy and tragedy, now we are doing a little melancholy."

The prisoner did not answer.

"Yes, yes," said Lord de Winter, "I understand. You would like to be free, in order to plan one of those nice little ambushes you are so clever at combining. Patience, patience! In four days the sea will be more open to you than you desire; for in four days England will be rid of you."

Milady clasped her hands, and raised her fine eyes to heaven.

"Lord, Lord!" she said, with angelic suavity of gesture and tone, "pardon this man, as I pardon him!"

"Yes, pray, accursed woman!" said the Baron. "Your prayer is all the more generous that you are in the hands of a man who will not forgive you."

And he left the room.

As he left, a piercing glance penetrated through the half-open door, and Milady caught sight of Felton, who drew rapidly back, so as not to be seen by her.

Then she threw herself on her knees, and began to pray.

"My God!" she said; "you know in what holy cause I suffer. Give me, then, the strength to suffer!"

The door opened gently; the lovely supplicant pretended not to have heard the noise, and, in a voice choked with tears, she continued:

"God of vengeance! God of goodness! will you allow the frightful projects of this man to be accomplished?"

Then only she pretended to hear Felton, and rising rapid as thought, she blushed, as if ashamed of having been caught upon her knees.

"I do not like to disturb those who pray, madam," said Felton gravely. "Do not, then, disturb yourself for me, I beg."

"How do you know that I was praying, sir?" asked Milady, in a voice choked with sobs. "You are mistaken, sir; I was not praying."

"Do you think, then, madam," said Felton, in the same serious voice, although with a softer accent, "that I consider myself entitled to hinder a creature from prostrating himself before his Creator? God forbid! Besides, repentance suits the guilty; no matter what crime he may have committed, a guilty person at the feet of God is sacred for me."

"Guilty! I?" ejaculated Milady, with a smile which would have disarmed the angel of the Day of Judgment. "Guilty! God knows if I am guilty! Say that I am condemned, sir; but you know that God, who loves martyrs, sometimes permits the innocent to be condemned."

"Whether condemned, whether innocent, whether a martyr," replied Felton, "the greater the reason to pray, and I myself will aid you with my prayers."

"Oh, you are a just man!" cried Milady, throwing herself at his feet. "I ask you for only one favour, and if you grant it I will bless you in this world and in the next."

"Speak to our master, madam," said Felton. "I am fortunately charged neither with pardoning nor punishing; it is to higher people than I that God has given this responsibility."

"To you; no; to you alone. Listen to me; rather than contribute to my ruin, rather than contribute to my ignominy."

"If you have deserved this shame, madam; if you have incurred this ignominy, you must submit to it, as an offering to God."

"What say you? Oh, you do not understand me! When I speak of ignominy, you imagine that I speak of some chastisement, of prison, or of death. What to me is death or imprisonment?"

"It is I who do not understand you, madam," said Felton.

"Or who pretend not to understand, sir!" replied the prisoner, with a smile of doubt.

"No, madam; on the honour of a soldier, on the faith of a Christian."

"What! you are ignorant of Lord de Winter's intentions respecting me?"

"I am ignorant of them."

"But," cried Milady, "are you not, then, his accomplice? You do not know that he destines for me a disgrace more horrible than all the punishments in the world?"

"You are mistaken, madam," said Felton, flushing; "Lord de Winter is incapable of such a crime."

"Good," said Milady to herself; "without knowing what it is, he calls it a crime!"

Then aloud:

"The friend of the infamous one is capable of anything."

"Whom do you call the infamous one?"

"Are there two men in England who deserve the name?"

"You speak of George Villiers?" said Felton, with flashing eyes.

"Whom Pagans and infidel Gentiles call Duke of Buckingham," rejoined Milady.

"The hand of the Lord is upon him," said Felton. "He will not escape the punishment he deserves."

Felton merely expressed, with regard to the Duke, the feeling of execration with which all Englishmen regarded the man whom the Catholics themselves called an extortioner, a peculator, a rake, and whom the Puritans called simply Satan.

"Oh, my God!" exclaimed Milady, "when I beseech Thee to send this man the punishment which is due to him, Thou knowest that it is not my own vengeance that I pursue, but the deliverance of a whole people which I implore."

"Do you, then, know him?" asked Felton.

"At last he is questioning me," said Milady to herself, highly delighted at having attained this result.—"Know him? Oh, yes, for my misfortune, my eternal misfortune!"

And Milady wrung her hands as if in a paroxysm of grief.

Felton no doubt felt that his strength of mind was forsaking him: he took some steps toward the door; the prisoner, who did not lose sight of him, bounded after him and stopped him.

"Sir," she cried, "be good, be merciful, listen to my prayer! That knife which the fatal prudence of the Baron deprived me of, because he knew the use I intended to make of it—oh, listen to the end!—that knife, return it to me for one minute only, I implore of you! You shall shut the door, I have nothing against

you. My God! injure you—the only just, kind, and compassionate person I have met; you, my deliverer, perhaps! That knife for one minute—one minute only, Mr Felton, and you will have saved my honour!"

"Kill yourself!" cried Felton, with horror, forgetting to withdraw his hands from the hands of the prisoner.

"I have told you, sir," murmured Milady, lowering her voice, and allowing herself to sink exhausted on the floor; "I have told you my secret. He knows all! My God! I am a lost woman!"

Felton remained standing, motionless and undecided.

"He still doubts," thought Milady; "I have not played my part with sufficient truth."

Some one was heard walking in the passage; Milady recognized the step of Lord de Winter.

Felton recognized it also, and went toward the door.

Milady darted forward.

"Oh, not a word!" said she in a concentrated tone; "not a word to this man of what I have said to you, or I am lost; and it is you——"

Then as the steps approached she became silent for fear of being overheard, placing, with a motion of infinite terror, her beautiful hand on Felton's mouth. Felton pushed Milady gently from him, and she sank on to a couch.

Lord de Winter passed before the door without stopping, and they heard the noise of his footsteps die away in the distance.

Felton, pale as death, remained for some moments with outstretched ear listening; and when the sound had completely died away he breathed like a man starting out of a dream, and rushed from the room.

"Ah!" said Milady, as she heard Felton go in the opposite direction to Lord de Winter, "at last you are mine."

Then her brow darkened.

"Should he speak to the Baron," she said, "I shall be lost; for he knows that I would not kill myself, and he will place the knife in my hands."

She looked at herself in the glass—she had never been more beautiful.

In the evening Lord de Winter accompanied the supper.

"Sir," said Milady, "is your presence an obligatory accessory to my captivity, and could you not spare the extra torture caused by your visits?"

"What! my dear sister? Did you not declare with your

pretty mouth, so cruel to-day, that you came to England on purpose to see me, risking for that object the sea, the tempest, captivity? However, this time my visit has a motive."

Milady shivered, she thought that Felton had spoken; never in her life, perhaps, did this woman, who had experienced so many powerful and conflicting emotions, feel her heart beat more violently.

Lord de Winter took a chair; then drawing a paper from his pocket, slowly unfolded it.

"Look," he said to her, "I wanted to show you this kind of passport, which I have drawn up myself, and which will serve you henceforth as a ticket in the life which I consent to leave you." He read: "'Order to conduct to —— '—the name of the place is left in blank," said Lord de Winter; "and you may choose for yourself, provided it be a thousand leagues from London—'Order to conduct to —— the so-called Charlotte Backson, branded by the law of France, but liberated after punishment; she shall remain in that residence without ever removing from it more than three leagues. In the event of her trying to escape, the pain of death shall be applied. She shall receive five shillings a day for food and lodging.'"

"That order does not concern me," replied Milady coldly; "since it bears a name which is not mine."

"A name! Have you got one?"

"I have that of your brother."

"You are mistaken; my brother was but your second husband, and your first husband is still alive. Tell me his name, and I will insert it instead of Charlotte Backson. No, you will not? Well, you shall be surrendered to justice as Charlotte Backson."

Milady remained silent, but this time it was not through affectation, but through terror; she believed the order to be ready for execution; she thought that Lord de Winter had advanced the day of her departure; she thought that she was condemned to start that same evening. In her opinion all was lost, when suddenly she perceived that the order was not signed.

The joy she felt at this discovery was so great that she could not conceal it.

"Yes, yes," said Lord de Winter, who saw what was passing in her mind; "you are looking for the signature, and you say all is not lost as the act is not signed; it is merely to frighten me. You are mistaken; to-morrow this order will be taken to the Duke of Buckingham, who will return it signed the next day. That is all that I had to say, madam."

"And I will reply, sir, that this abuse of power—that this exile under a fictitious name, is infamous!"

"Would you prefer being hung under your real name? You know that the English laws are inexorable as regards marriage."

Milady did not reply; she became livid.

"Oh! I see that you prefer peregrination! There is an old proverb, madam, which says, that 'Travelling forms youth.' Indeed, you are not wrong; life is sweet, and that is why I do not desire that you should deprive me of mine. As regards the five shillings, you may accuse me of parsimony, but I do not wish you to corrupt your warders. Besides, your charms will remain; employ them if your failure with respect to Felton has not disgusted you."

"Felton has not spoken," said Milady to herself, "nothing is lost."

"And now, madam, good-bye."

Lord de Winter rose, bowed ironically, and left the room.

Milady breathed once more: she had four days before her—four days to finish the seduction of Felton.

However, a terrible idea occurred to her. It was that Lord de Winter might send Felton himself with the order to Buckingham, in that case Felton would escape her. Not wishing to appear too much troubled by the threats of Lord de Winter, she sat down to table and ate.

Then, as on the previous evening, she went down on her knees and repeated her prayers aloud. As on the previous evening, the sentry paused on his beat and listened at the door.

Soon she heard steps lighter than those of the sentry coming along the corridor. "It is he," she said.

And she began singing the same hymn which had so violently excited Felton the evening before.

But although the sweet, full, and sonorous voice vibrated more harmoniously than ever, the door remained closed. However, after she had finished, Milady thought that she heard a deep sigh.

CHAPTER LIV

THE FOURTH DAY OF CAPTIVITY

THE next day when Felton entered Milady's room, he found her standing up on a chair, holding in her hands a rope, made out of some cambric handkerchiefs which she had torn, twisted, and tied together; at the noise which Felton made in opening the door, Milady jumped lightly down, and tried to hide the improvised rope behind her.

The young man was even paler than usual, and his eyes, red with want of sleep, showed that he had spent a feverish night.

"What is that, madam?" he asked coldly.

"That? nothing," said Milady, smiling with that painful expression which she knew so well how to put on. "Idleness is the mortal enemy of prisoners, and I was trying to amuse myself by weaving this rope."

Felton looked at that part of the wall in front of which he had found Milady standing on the chair, and above her head he saw a gilded hook. He shuddered, and the prisoner, although she had lowered her eyes, saw that shudder.

"And what were you doing on that chair?" he asked.

"Do not question me," said the prisoner; "you know that we true Christians are forbidden to lie."

"Well!" said Felton, "I will tell you what you were doing; you were about to finish the fatal work which you cherish in your mind. Remember, madam, that if God has forbidden lying, He has forbidden suicide even more severely."

"When God sees that one of His creatures is unjustly persecuted, placed between suicide and dishonour, believe me, sir," said Milady, in a tone of profound conviction, "God will pardon suicide, for then suicide becomes martyrdom."

"You say too little, or too much, madam; in the name of Heaven explain yourself."

"Relate my misfortunes to you to have them treated as fables; tell you my projects, that you may betray them to my persecutor: no, sir, besides, what matters to you the life or death of an unfortunate, condemned woman?"

"My duty is to watch over your life, madam, and I will watch over it."

"But do you understand the mission you are fulfilling? A cruel mission, even were I guilty, what name will you give it, what name will the Lord give it, if I be innocent?"

" But I repeat," said Felton, greatly agitated, " that no danger threatens you, and that I can answer for Lord de Winter as for myself."

" Madman," cried Milady, " poor madman, who dares to answer for another, when the wisest, and those most after God's heart, hesitate to answer for themselves! Would you side with the strong and the happy, against the weak and the unfortunate?"

" Impossible, madam, impossible," murmured Felton, who felt the justice of this argument in the bottom of his heart; " prisoner, you will not recover your liberty through me: alive, you will not lose your life through me."

" Yes," cried Milady, " but I shall lose what is far more dear than life, I shall lose my honour, Felton; and it is you, you that I shall hold responsible before God and man, for my shame, my infamy."

This time Felton, impassive though he was, could not resist the secret influence which had seized upon him. Milady saw his agitation, she felt by intuition the flame of opposing passions which burned the blood in the veins of this young fanatic; and like a skilful general, who, seeing the enemy ready to retreat, marches against him with a shout of victory, she rose, beautiful as an ancient priestess, inspired like a Christian virgin, and with arms outstretched, her neck uncovered, her hair dishevelled, holding with one hand her robe, modestly drawn over her bosom, her eyes kindled by that flame which had already so troubled the senses of the young Puritan, she marched toward him singing in a vehement manner, with her sweet voice, to which on occasions she gave a terrible accent:

> " To Baal send thy victim if thou wilt,
> The martyr to the lions may be thrown,
> But in remorse though thou my death disown,
> God shall regard the measure of thy guilt."

Felton stood still under this strange apostrophe as if he had been turned to stone.

" Who are you?" he cried, wringing his hands; " have you been sent by God, are you a minister of hell, are you angel or demon?"

" Have you not recognized me, Felton; I am neither angel nor demon, I am a daughter of the earth, I am a sister of thy faith, and that is all."

" Yes, yes," cried Felton, " I doubted still, but now I believe."

"You believe, and yet you are the accomplice of that child of Belial, who is called Lord de Winter! You believe, and yet you leave me in the hands of my enemies, of the enemy of England, of the enemy of God! You believe, and you deliver me to him who fills and who degrades the world with his heresies and his debaucheries, to that infamous Sardanapalus whom the blind call the Duke of Buckingham, and whom believers call anti-Christ."

"I deliver you to Buckingham! What say you?"

"They have eyes," said Milady, "and they see not; ears have they and hear not."

"Yes, yes," said Felton, passing his hands over his damp brow, as if to remove a last doubt, "yes, I recognize the voice which speaks to me in my dreams; yes, I recognize the features of the angel who appears to me every night crying to my soul, which cannot sleep, 'Strike, save England, save yourself, for you shall die without having disarmed God.' Speak, speak," cried Felton, "I can understand you now."

A gleam of terrible joy flashed from the eyes of Milady.

However fugitive that homicidal ray, Felton saw it and shuddered, as if it had revealed the abysses of that woman's heart.

He suddenly remembered the warnings of Lord de Winter, the seductions of Milady, her first efforts on her arrival; he drew back a pace and lowered his head, but without ceasing to look at her: as if fascinated by that strange creature, he could not detach his eyes from hers.

Milady was not a woman to misinterpret his hesitation. Beneath her apparent emotions her presence of mind never forsook her. Before Felton could reply, and before she could resume this conversation, so difficult to be sustained at the same pitch of exaltation, she let her hands fall as if the weakness of the woman had conquered the enthusiasm of the fanatic.

"No," she said, "it is not for me to be the Judith to deliver Bethulia from this Holofernes. Let me die, that is all. I entreat you, I implore you on my knees, allow me to die, and my last breath shall be a blessing on my deliverer."

At this sweet and suppliant voice, at this timid and downcast look, Felton drew nearer. Little by little the enchantress clothed herself in that magic garment which she put on and threw off at will; that is to say, beauty, gentleness, tears, and, above all, the irresistible attraction of mystical voluptuousness.

"Alas!" said Felton, "I can do but one thing, pity you, if you can prove that you are a victim. But Lord de Winter brings

cruel charges against you. You are a Christian, you are my sister in religion; I feel myself drawn toward you, I who have never loved any but my benefactor; I who have found in life only impious men and traitors. But you, madam, so lovely in reality, you, so pure in appearance, for Lord de Winter to persecute you thus, you must surely have committed iniquities!"

"They have eyes," repeated Milady with an ineffable accent of sorrow, "and they see not; ears have they and they hear not."

"But then," cried the young officer, "speak, speak!"

"Confide my shame to you!" exclaimed Milady, while a blush suffused her face, "for often the crime of one is the shame of the other. Confide my shame to you, a man! Oh!" she continued, covering her eyes modestly with her hands, "that I can never do!"

"To me, to a brother," cried Felton.

Milady looked at him for a long time with an expression which he took for doubt, but which was merely meant to fascinate him.

Felton, in his turn a suppliant, joined his hands together.

"Well," said Milady, "I trust to my brother; I will dare——"

At this moment they heard the step of Lord de Winter; but this time the terrible brother-in-law of Milady did not pass the door; after exchanging a couple of words with the sentry at the door, he entered.

Whilst those two words were being spoken Felton had hastily drawn back, and when Lord de Winter appeared he was at some paces from the prisoner.

The Baron entered slowly, fixing a scrutinizing look on the prisoner and on the young officer.

"You have been here a long time, John," said he; "has this woman been telling you her crimes? In that case I can understand the length of the conversation."

Felton started, and Milady felt that she would be lost unless she came to the rescue of the disconcerted Puritan.

"Ah! you fear that your prisoner may escape!" cried Milady; "well, ask your worthy jailer what favour I was in the act of soliciting."

"You were soliciting a favour?" said the Baron suspiciously.

"Yes, my lord," replied the young man, with some confusion.

"And what favour?" asked Lord de Winter.

"A knife, which she would return to me through the wicket after a minute," said Felton.

"Is there some one hidden here whom this gracious person

desires to murder ? " replied Lord de Winter, in a jeering and disdainful voice.

" There is myself," said Milady.

" I gave you the choice between America and Tyburn," replied Lord de Winter ; " choose Tyburn, Milady ; the rope, believe me, is surer than the knife."

Felton grew pale, and took a step forward, remembering that when he had entered Milady had a rope in her hand.

" You are right," said she ; " I had already thought of that, and I will think about it again."

Felton experienced shudder which went through all his body ; Lord de Winter noticed this movement.

" Beware, my friend John," he said ; " I have put my trust in you. Take care ! I have warned you. Besides, be of good courage, my lad ; in three days you will be delivered from this creature."

" You hear him ! " cried Milady, in such a manner that Lord de Winter thought that she was addressing Heaven, and that Felton understood she was addressing him.

Felton bowed his head as if buried in thought.

The Baron took the young officer by the arm, looking over his shoulder, so as not to lose sight of Milady until he left the room.

Milady waited with impatience, for she felt certain that the day would not pass without her seeing Felton again. At last, an hour after the scene which we have related, the door opened and Felton appeared.

The young man advanced rapidly, leaving the door open behind him, and motioning Milady to be silent.

His features were drawn.

" What do you want ? " she said.

" Listen," whispered Felton, " I have just sent away the sentinel so that I may remain here without anyone knowing it, and so that I may speak to you without being overheard. The Baron has just told me a frightful story."

Milady assumed the smile of a resigned victim, and shook her head.

" Either you are a demon," said Felton, " or the Baron, my benefactor, my father, is a monster. I have known you for four days, I have loved him for two years ; I can therefore hesitate between you two. Do not be alarmed at what I say, I need to be convinced. After midnight I will come and see you, and you shall convince me."

"No, Felton; no, brother," said she, "the sacrifice is too great, and I feel that it costs you too much. No, I am lost, and you must not lose yourself with me. My death will be much more eloquent than my life, and the silence of my dead body will convince you better than the words of a prisoner."

"Be silent, madam," said Felton; "do not speak thus to me. I have come to make you swear on your honour that you will not attempt to take away your life."

"I will not promise," said Milady, "for no one has a greater respect for his word than I have."

"Well," said Felton, "bind yourself only until I have seen you again. If you persist afterward, you shall be free, and I myself will give you the weapon you have asked for."

"Well," said Milady, "I will wait for you."

"You swear it?"

"I swear it by our God. Are you satisfied?"

"To-night, then," said Felton, who darted from the room.

CHAPTER LV

THE FIFTH DAY OF CAPTIVITY

MILADY had time to make all her plans to receive Felton.

She knew that she had only two days left, and that as soon as the order had been signed by Buckingham, the Baron would ship her off without delay.

She had little doubt she would return from her place of exile, but how long would that exile last?

For a character so active and ambitious, the days which are not spent in climbing higher are days lost. To lose a year, two years, three years, that is to say an eternity, to return when D'Artagnan and his friends, happy and triumphant, had received from the Queen the reward for their services: these were ideas which Milady could not bear.

Then what spurred her on still more was the thought of the Cardinal. She knew him well; she was aware that returning from a useless voyage, it would be vain to plead that she had been in prison, and to exaggerate her sufferings; the Cardinal would reply with the calm raillery of the sceptic: "You should not have allowed yourself to be caught."

Meanwhile the time was gliding on, and the hours seemed to

awaken the clock as they succeeded each other, each stroke of its brazen tongue re-echoing in the heart of the prisoner.

At nine o'clock Lord de Winter paid his usual visit, and minutely inspected the room.

Neither he nor Milady uttered a word.

No doubt they both understood that the situation had become too serious for wasting time in idle talk and useless anger.

" Come," said the Baron on leaving, " you will not escape to-night."

At ten o'clock Felton came to post the sentry ; Milady recognized his footstep. She knew it now, as well as a mistress knows that of her lover, and yet Milady both detested and despised this weak-minded fanatic.

It was not the hour agreed upon, and Felton did not enter.

Two hours later, as midnight sounded, the sentry was relieved.

This time it was the hour, and from that moment Milady waited with impatience.

The new sentry began to march up and down the corridor.

At the end of ten minutes Felton arrived.

Milady listened.

" You must on no account leave this door," said the young man to the sentry, " for you know that last night a soldier was punished for leaving his post for a minute, and yet during his short absence I watched in his place."

" I am aware of that," said the soldier.

" Keep a sharp watch. I am going to visit this chamber a second time, as I fear the prisoner has designs on her life, and I have received orders to watch her carefully."

" Good," murmured Milady, " here is our austere Puritan telling falsehoods ! "

As for the soldier, he smiled.

" Indeed, sir," he said, " I wish I had your job, especially if my lord has authorized you to look even into the bed."

Felton flushed : under any other circumstances he would have reprimanded the soldier who permitted himself such a joke, but his conscience smote him, and he did not dare to retort.

" If I call, come in ; and if anyone comes, call me."

" Yes," replied the soldier.

Felton entered the room. Milady rose.

" You are here," she said.

" I promised to come," said Felton, " and I have come."

" You promised me still more."

" What then ? " replied the young man, who, in spite of the

control he had over himself, felt his knees trembling, and the sweat breaking out on his forehead.

"You promised to bring me a knife, and to leave it with me after our interview."

"Do not speak of that, madam. There is no situation, no matter how terrible, which can authorize one of God's creatures to take his life. I have reflected that I cannot render myself guilty of such a sin."

"Ah! you have reflected," said the prisoner, seating herself in her armchair, with a smile of disdain; "and I also have reflected."

"About what?"

"That I can have nothing to say to a man who fails to keep his word."

"O my God!" murmured Felton.

"You may retire," said Milady; "I will not speak."

"Here is the knife," said Felton, drawing from his pocket the weapon which, according to promise, he had brought, but had hesitated about giving to the prisoner.

"Let me see it," said Milady.

"What would you do with it?"

"On my honour, I will return it to you directly; you shall place it on the table, and stand between it and me."

Felton held out the weapon to Milady, who examined it attentively, and tried the point on her finger.

"Good," said she, returning the knife; "this is excellent steel; you are a faithful friend, Felton."

Felton took the knife and placed it on the table as agreed.

Milady followed him with her eyes, and made a movement of satisfaction.

"Now, listen to me," said Milady, in a solemn and melancholy voice; "if your sister were to say: 'Still young, cursed with good looks, I was drawn into a snare, I resisted; they multiplied their schemes and their violence, I resisted; they blasphemed the religion I profess, the God I adore, because I called to my aid that God and that religion, I resisted; then they heaped outrages on me, and not being able to lose my soul, they determined to defile my body; at last——'"

Milady stopped, and a bitter smile passed over her lips.

"At last," said Felton, "what did they do?"

"At last, one evening they determined to paralyse this resistance which they could not conquer. One evening they mixed a powerful narcotic with my drink. I had hardly finished my

repast, when I felt myself falling by degrees into a state of torpor. Although I was without suspicion, a vague fear seized me, and I endeavoured to struggle against sleep. I got up; I tried to run to the window to call for assistance, but my legs refused to support me. It appeared to me as if the ceiling had fallen on my head, and had crushed me; I stretched out my arms, I tried to speak, I could utter only inarticulate sounds. I tried to pray, but my tongue was numb. God, no doubt, neither saw nor heard me. I fell to the floor a prey to a sleep which resembled death.

"Of what happened during my sleep, and how long it lasted, I have no recollection; the only thing which I remember is that when I awoke I was lying in bed in a room sumptuously furnished, and into which daylight penetrated by an opening in the ceiling. There was no door to be seen: it might have been a magnificent prison.

"It was a long time before I could recover my senses; the state in which I found myself was so strange that I thought I was dreaming. I got up, staggering; my clothes were near me; I could not recollect having undressed, nor having gone to bed. Then by degrees the reality presented itself with all its horrors. I was not in the house I inhabited; as far as I could judge by the light of the sun, two-thirds of the day had passed, and I must have slept for twenty-four hours. What had happened during that long sleep?

"I dressed as rapidly as possible. All my movements were slow and numbed, and showed that the influence of this narcotic had not disappeared. The room had evidently been furnished for the reception of a woman, and I was assuredly not the first captive who had been shut up in that splendid prison.

"Yes, it was a prison, for I tried in vain to escape, and at last, overwhelmed with fatigue and terror, I sank into an arm-chair.

"During this time night came on rapidly, and with the darkness my terrors increased. It seemed to me that I was surrounded by unknown dangers. No noise came from without to permit me to measure time; I presumed it was about eight in the evening when suddenly a door turning in its hinges made me start; a globe of fire appeared in the opening of the ceiling, throwing a vivid light into the room, and I saw with terror that a man was standing at a few paces from me.

"This man was the one who had been pursuing me for a year, who had sworn to dishonour me, and who, by the first words

which escaped from his lips, made me understand what he had accomplished the preceding night."

"The scoundrel!" murmured Felton.

Milady perceived the pain caused by her narrative, and would not spare Felton an atom of torture. The more deeply she could wound his heart, the more surely would he avenge her.

She continued, therefore, as if she had not heard his exclamation:

"Only this time it was no longer with an inert body that he had to deal. Without being able to recover the complete use of my faculties, I retained a perception of my danger. I struggled with all my strength, and no doubt I offered a long resistance, for I heard him exclaim:

"'These wretches of Puritans! I knew that they wearied out their executioners, but I thought they offered less resistance to their lovers.'

"Alas! this resistance could not last for ever. My strength was exhausted, and this time the coward took advantage, not of my sleep, but of my faintness."

Felton listened, uttering hollow groans; a cold sweat beaded his forehead, and his hand, hidden beneath his coat, tore his chest.

"My first movement, on coming to myself, was to search under my pillow for my knife; but in taking it, Felton, a horrible idea occurred to me. I have sworn to tell you all, and I shall tell you all——"

"You conceived the idea of revenging yourself on that man?" said Felton. "Is it not so?"

"Well, yes. This idea was not Christian-like; no doubt the eternal enemy of our souls suggested it to me. Yet I could not shake it off, and it is this homicidal thought which has brought punishment to me to-day."

"Continue, continue," cried Felton; "and come to the vengeance."

"Oh, I determined that it should take place as soon as possible.

"I felt sure that he would return the following night. In the daytime I had nothing to fear. Therefore, when breakfast-time arrived, I did not hesitate to eat and drink, but I determined to merely pretend to sup.

"The day passed away without my resolution being shaken.

"At last I heard the well-known noise of the door opening and shutting, and, in spite of the thickness of the carpet, the sound

of his footstep on the floor. I saw, in spite of the darkness, a shadow approaching my bed."

"Make haste, make haste!" cried Felton. "Do you not see that every one of your words burns me like molten lead?"

"Then," continued Milady, "I summoned up all my energy; the hour for vengeance had sounded. I looked upon myself as another Judith. I seized my knife, and, with a last cry of rage and despair, I struck him in the middle of the chest.

"The scoundrel! He had foreseen everything; he wore a coat of mail, and the knife was turned aside.

"'Ah, ah!' he cried, seizing my arm, and snatching from me the weapon of which I had made so little use, 'you wish to take away my life, my pretty Puritan! But that is more than hatred; it is ingratitude! Come, come; calm yourself, my dear! I am not one of those tyrants who detain women by force. You do not love me? With my ordinary self-conceit I could hardly believe this. Now I am convinced of it. To-morrow you shall be free.'

"I had but one desire, that he should kill me.

"'Take care,' I cried; 'my liberty will be your dishonour. Yes, for as soon as I leave this place I will make known the violence you have employed toward me. I will denounce this palace of infamy. You occupy a lofty position, my lord; but tremble. Above you there is the King, and above the King there is God.'

"My persecutor allowed a movement of anger to escape him. I could not see the expression of his features, but I felt his arm tremble.

"'Listen,' said he; 'I will give you till to-morrow to reflect. Promise to hold your tongue, and riches, esteem, honours even, shall surround you; threaten to speak, and I shall condemn you to infamy.'

"Oh, I tell you, Felton, that I thought he had gone mad.

"'Ah, leave me,' I said, 'if you do not wish to see me dash my head against the wall!'

"'Very well,' he rejoined, 'as you like—until to-morrow evening.'

"'Until to-morrow evening,' I replied, allowing myself to fall down, and biting the carpet in my rage——"

Felton leaned against the table, and Milady saw with the joy of a demon that his strength would perhaps fail him before she finished her narrative.

CHAPTER LVI

A CLASSICAL TRAGEDY DODGE

AFTER a moment's silence, employed by Milady in watching the young man, she continued:

"For nearly three days and three nights I had eaten nothing; I suffered the most atrocious tortures—sometimes a mist obscured my vision. The evening came: I was so weak that I fainted at every moment, each time thanking God, for I thought that I was dying.

"In the middle of one of these fainting fits the door opened; terror restored me to my senses. He entered, followed by a man in a mask; he was masked himself, but I recognized his step and his voice, and that imposing air which hell has bestowed upon his person for the misfortune of humanity.

"'Well,' said he, 'have you made up your mind to take the oath which I have asked for?'

"'You have said that the Puritans keep their word; you have heard mine.'

"'Therefore you persist?'

"'I swear it before God who hears me.'

"'You are a prostitute!' he cried, in a voice of thunder; 'and you shall undergo the punishment of prostitutes! Branded in the eyes of the world you would invoke; try and prove to this world that you are neither guilty nor mad!'

"Then, addressing the man who accompanied him, he said:

"'Executioner, do your duty.'"

"Oh! his name—his name!" cried Felton.

"Then, in spite of my cries and my resistance, the executioner seized me, threw me on the floor. Almost suffocated with sobs, calling upon God, who did not hear me, I suddenly uttered a fearful cry of pain and of shame—a red-hot iron had printed a mark on my shoulder."

Felton uttered a groan.

"Here," said Milady, rising with the majesty of a queen, "here, Felton, see how they have invented a new species of martyrdom for a young girl, pure, and yet the victim of the brutality of a ruffian. Learn to know the heart of men, and for the future make yourself less easily the instrument of their unjust vengeance."

Milady, with a rapid movement, opened her dress, tore away the cambric which covered her bosom, and, red with feigned

anger and shame, showed the young man the indelible mark which dishonoured her beautiful shoulder.

"But," said Felton, "that is a *fleur-de-lis* which I see."

"And there lies the infamy," replied Milady. "With an English brand, it would have been necessary to prove what tribunal had imposed it, and I should have made a public appeal to all the tribunals of the kingdom; but the French brand—with that I was branded indeed!"

This was too much for Felton.

"Pardon me! pardon me!" cried Felton.

Milady read his love in his eyes.

"Pardon you for what?" she asked.

"For having joined your persecutors."

Milady held out her hand.

"So beautiful! so young!" cried Felton, covering it with kisses.

Milady let fall upon him one of those glances which make a slave of a king.

Felton was a Puritan; he dropped the hand of this woman to kiss her feet.

He no longer loved her, he adored her.

"And now," he said, "I have only one thing to ask—what is the name of your real executioner, of the one who employed the other."

"What, brother!" cried Milady, "I must name him; you have not guessed?"

"What he!—again he!—always he! What! the guilt rests with——"

"The guilt," said Milady, "rests with the ravager of England; the persecutor of true believers; the cowardly ravisher of the honour of so many women; he, who for a caprice of his corrupt heart, is going to shed the blood of England, who protects the Protestants to-day, and who will betray them to-morrow."

"Buckingham! it is this Buckingham!" cried Felton, exasperated.

Milady hid her face in her hands, as if unable to bear the shame recalled by that name.

"Buckingham the torturer of this angelic creature!" cried Felton. "And Thou hast not struck him down with Thy lightning, my God! and Thou hast left him noble, honoured, and powerful to work our destruction!"

"Men fear him and spare him."

"Not I! I do not fear him, and will not spare him——"

Milady's heart leapt with infernal joy.

"But how is Lord de Winter, my protector, almost my father, mixed in all this?"

"Listen, Felton," replied Milady. "I was engaged to be married to a man whom I loved, and who loved me—to a man like you, Felton, with such a heart as yours. I told him all: he knew me, and did not for a moment doubt me. He was a great nobleman, quite equal to Buckingham. He said nothing, he merely buckled on his sword, and went to Buckingham Palace."

"Yes, yes, I understand; although with such men it is not the sword but the dagger which should be employed."

"Buckingham had left the evening before, sent as ambassador to Spain, whither he went to seek the hand of the Infanta for Charles I, who was then Prince of Wales. My affianced husband returned.

"'Listen,' he said to me; 'that man is gone, and consequently for the moment he escapes my vengeance; but, in the meantime, let us be united, and leave to Lord de Winter the care of his honour and of that of his wife.'

"Lord de Winter!" cried Felton.

"Yes," said Milady, "Lord de Winter; and now you understand, do you not? Buckingham remained absent about a year. A week before his return, Lord de Winter died suddenly, leaving me his sole heiress. Whence came the blow? God, who knows all, knows that; I accuse no one."

"Oh! what depths of villainy!" cried Felton.

"Lord de Winter died without saying anything to his brother. The terrible secret was to remain hidden until it burst like thunder on the head of the guilty. Your protector had seen with pain the marriage of his brother with a young girl without fortune. I felt that I could not expect any support from a man who had been deceived in his hopes of an inheritance. I went to France, determined to spend the remainder of my life there. But all my fortune is in England; communications were interrupted by the war, I was in want of everything; I was obliged to return; six days ago I landed at Portsmouth."

"Well!" said Felton.

"Well! no doubt Buckingham heard of my return, he spoke of me to Lord de Winter, who was already prejudiced against me, and told him that his sister was a prostitute and had been branded. My husband was not there to defend me. Lord de Winter believed all that was told him. He had me arrested, brought here, and placed under your care. You know the rest.

The day after to-morrow I am to be banished. The plot was skilfully combined, and my honour will not survive it. You see that I must die, Felton; Felton, give me that knife."

At these words, as if all her strength were exhausted, Milady allowed herself to sink into the arms of the young officer, who, intoxicated with love, with anger, with new and sensuous feelings, received her with delight, and pressed her against his heart, overcome by the contact with her palpitating bosom.

"No!" cried Felton, "you shall live, and live avenged."

"Felton, I bring misfortune upon all who approach me! Felton, abandon me and let me die!"

"Well, we will die together!" he cried, pressing his lips to those of the prisoner.

There were several knocks at the door, and this time Milady pushed Felton away in reality.

"We have been overheard," she said; "they are coming; it is all over, we are lost."

"No," said Felton; "it is merely the sentinel, who warns me that the relief is coming."

"Then run to the door and open it yourself."

Felton opened and found himself in the presence of a sergeant in command of a patrol.

"Well! what is the matter?" asked the lieutenant.

"You told me to open if you cried out," said the soldier, "but you forgot to leave me the key. I heard you cry out, but, as the door was locked from the inside, I called the sergeant."

Felton, bewildered, and distracted, remained speechless.

Milady understood that it was for her to interfere; she ran to the table and snatched up the knife.

"And what right have you to prevent me from dying?" said she.

"Good God!" cried Felton, seeing the knife gleam in her hand.

At this moment a burst of ironical laughter was heard in the corridor.

The Baron, attracted by the noise, was standing at the door in his dressing-gown, with his sword under his arm.

"Ah! ah!" said he, "here is the last act of the tragedy. You see, Felton, the drama has followed all the phases which I pointed out; but make your mind easy, no blood will flow."

Milady felt that all was lost unless she gave Felton a terrible and immediate proof of her courage.

"You are mistaken, my lord; blood will flow, and may that blood fall on those who made it flow."

Felton uttered a cry and sprang forward; it was too late, Milady had stabbed herself.

But the knife had encountered, by good fortune and skill, the steel busk which then protected the bosoms of ladies like a cuirass; it had glanced off, tearing the dress and penetrating between the flesh and the ribs.

Milady's dress was none the less instantly stained with blood.

She had fallen back and appeared to have fainted.

Felton pulled out the knife.

"You see, my lord," he said gloomily, "here is a woman who was under my guard, and who has killed herself!"

"Do not be alarmed, Felton," said Lord de Winter; "she is not dead, demons do not die so easily; make your mind easy, and go and wait for me in my room."

"But, my lord——"

"Go! I order you."

Felton obeyed, but as he left the room, he hid the knife in his breast.

As for Lord de Winter, he merely called the woman who waited upon Milady, recommended the prisoner to her, and left them alone.

However, as the wound might be serious, he dispatched a man on horseback for a doctor.

CHAPTER LVII

THE EVASION

AS Lord de Winter thought, Milady's wound was not dangerous, and as soon as she found herself alone with the woman sent for by the Baron, and who had begun to undress her, she opened her eyes.

However, it was well to simulate weakness and pain, which was not difficult for so accomplished a comedian as Milady. The poor woman, completely duped, insisted upon passing the night in her room.

In the morning Milady, on the pretext that she had not slept during the night, and stood in need of repose, sent away the woman who had watched over her.

She hoped that Felton would arrive at the hour of breakfast. Felton did not appear.

Were her fears to be realized? Would Felton, suspected by

the Baron, fail her at the decisive moment? She had only another day. Lord de Winter had announced her departure for the 23rd, and it was the morning of the 22nd. Nevertheless she waited patiently until the hour for dinner.

Although she had eaten nothing in the morning, the dinner was served at the usual hour.

Milady then noticed with dismay that the uniform of the soldiers who guarded her had been changed.

She then ventured to ask what had become of Felton.

The reply was that Felton had mounted a horse and had ridden away an hour before.

She asked if the Baron was still at the castle.

The soldier replied that he was, and had given orders to warn him if the prisoner wished to speak to him.

Milady replied that she was too feeble for the moment, and that her sole desire was to be left alone.

Felton had been sent away; the marines had been changed, therefore Felton was distrusted.

This was the last blow for the prisoner.

Once alone, Milady rose. That bed in which she remained through prudence, so that they might think that she was seriously wounded, burned her like a furnace.

She cast a glance at the door; the Baron had caused a plank to be nailed over the wicket; he no doubt feared that by that opening she might find some diabolical means for seducing her jailers.

Milady smiled with joy; she could give way to her feelings without being observed; she paced the room like a tigress shut up in an iron cage. If the knife had not been taken away she would have thought, not of killing herself, but of killing the Baron.

At six o'clock Lord de Winter entered, armed to the teeth.

This man, in whom Milady had hitherto seen but a rather silly gentleman, had become an admirable jailer, who foresaw everything.

At a single glance he saw what was passing in the mind of Milady.

"Nay," he said, "you shall not kill me to-day. You had begun to pervert my poor Felton; he was yielding to your infernal influence, but you shall see him no more; it is finished. Get your goods together, for you shall start to-morrow. At noon I shall receive the order for your exile signed by Buckingham. If you say a word before embarking, the sergeant will blow out

your brains; if you say a word on board ship, the captain will sling you into the sea. Good-bye for to-day; to-morrow I will bid you farewell."

Milady had listened to this tirade with a smile of disdain on her lips, but with rage in her heart.

Supper was served. Milady felt that she required strength; she knew not what might happen. Night was approaching; thick clouds covered the sky, and distant flashes of lightning announced a storm.

The storm broke at about ten o'clock, and Milady experienced some consolation in seeing Nature share the disorder which reigned in her heart. Lightning rent the air as rage rent her bosom; she shrieked like the hurricane, and her voice was lost in the loud voice of Nature, which also appeared to shriek in despair.

Suddenly she heard some one knock at the window, and by a flash of lightning she saw the face of a man through the bars.

She ran to the window and opened it.

"Felton!" she cried; "I am saved."

"Yes," said Felton, "but silence. I require time to saw the bars. Take care that they do not see you through the wicket."

"Oh, it is a proof that the Lord is for us, Felton," replied Milady, "they have closed the wicket with a plank."

"God has deprived them of their reason," said Felton.

"But what must I do?" asked Milady.

"Nothing, only shut the window: lie down on your bed, and when I have finished I will knock again. But will you be able to follow me?"

"Oh, yes."

"But your wound?"

"It hurts me, but does not prevent me from walking."

"Then hold yourself ready for the first signal."

Milady shut the window, extinguished the lamp, and threw herself on the bed.

Amid the noise of the storm she heard the grating of the file against the bars, and at each flash of lightning she saw the shadow of Felton behind the panes.

There are hours which appear to be years.

At length Felton knocked again. Milady jumped out of bed and opened the window.

Two bars had been removed.

"Are you ready?" asked Felton.

"Yes. Must I take anything with me?"

"Gold, if you have any."

"Yes, fortunately they left me what I had.

"So much the better, for I spent all mine in hiring a ship."

"Take this," said Milady, placing a bag of louis in Felton's hands.

"Now," said he, "will you come?"

Milady got on a chair and passed the upper portion of her body through the window; she saw the young officer suspended over the abyss by a rope ladder.

For the first time a movement of terror reminded her that she was a woman. The void terrified her.

"Throw your arms round my neck and fear nothing."

There was not a minute to be lost. Milady passed her arms round Felton's neck, and allowed herself to slip from the window.

Felton began to descend slowly. In spite of the weight of the two bodies the storm swung them about in the air.

Suddenly Felton stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked Milady.

"Silence," replied Felton, "I hear steps."

"We are discovered."

"No, it is nothing."

"But what is that noise?"

"It is the patrol going its rounds."

"It will discover us."

"Not unless there are lightning flashes."

"Here it comes; my God!"

"Silence!"

The two remained suspended, motionless, without breathing, at twenty feet from the ground, while the soldiers passed beneath them laughing and talking.

This was a terrible moment for the fugitives.

The patrol passed; the noise of their footsteps and the murmur of their voices died away.

"Now," said Felton, "we are saved."

Milady heaved a sigh and fainted.

Felton continued to descend, and reached the bottom of the ladder; then he picked up the bag of gold, took Milady in his arms and hurried away in the opposite direction to that taken by the patrol.

Crossing the rocks, he reached the sea and whistled.

He was answered by a similar signal, and five minutes afterward he saw a boat appear rowed by four men. It could not quite touch the shore.

Felton plunged into the water up to his waist, unwilling to entrust his precious burden to another.

Happily the tempest began to calm down, and yet the sea was still violent. The little boat danced on the waves like a walnut-shell.

"To the sloop," said Felton, "and pull fast."

The four men bent to their oars; but the sea was too rough for them to make much way.

The night, however, was intensely dark, and as it was almost impossible to distinguish the shore from the boat, it was even more difficult to distinguish the boat from the shore.

A black speck was rocking on the deep; it was the sloop.

While the boat was being pulled along, Felton took some water from the sea and sprinkled it over Milady's face.

Milady heaved a sigh, and opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" she asked.

"Saved," replied Felton.

"Oh! saved, saved!" she cried. "Yes, here are heaven and sea! The air which I breathe is that of liberty. Ah! thank you, Felton; thank you!"

The young man pressed her to his heart.

Milady looked round her.

"It is there," said Felton, pushing the bag of gold with his foot.

They drew near to the sloop. A sailor on watch hailed the boat, which replied.

"What boat is that?" asked Milady.

"That which I hired for you."

"Where will it take me?"

"Wherever you like, provided that you land me at Portsmouth."

"What are you going to do at Portsmouth?" asked Milady.

"Accomplish the orders of Lord de Winter," said Felton, with a gloomy smile.

"What orders?" asked Milady.

"You do not understand."

"No; explain yourself, I beg of you."

"As he distrusted me, he said he would guard you himself, and sent me to have the order for your transportation signed by Buckingham."

"But if he distrusted you why did he confide this order to you?"

"Was I supposed to know what I carried?"

"That is true. And you are going to Portsmouth?

"I have no time to lose, for to-morrow Buckingham is to sail with the fleet."

"He starts to-morrow; where is he going?"

"To La Rochelle."

"He must not be allowed to go," said Milady, forgetting her usual presence of mind.

"Fear nothing," said Felton, "he shall not go."

Milady started with joy; she had just read within the young man's heart—the death of Buckingham was plainly written there.

"Felton," she said, "you are great as Judas Maccabeus. If you die, I will die with you. That is all I can say."

"Silence," said Felton, "we have arrived." They were alongside the sloop.

Felton ascended the ladder, and gave his hand to Milady. A minute afterward they were both on the deck.

"Captain," said Felton, "here is the person of whom I spoke, and you must take her safe and sound to France."

"For the sum of a thousand pistoles?"

"I have given you five hundred."

"Well," said Milady, "if you keep your word, I shall give you not five hundred but a thousand pistoles."

"Hurrah for you, my fair lady," cried the captain, "and may God often send me customers like your ladyship!"

"In the meantime," said Felton, "steer for the little bay, where it is agreed that you shall land me."

The bay was reached in the morning, and the sloop cast anchor.

During the trip, Felton explained to Milady how he had managed to scale the walls of the castle, and to fix the rope-ladder to the bars.

On her side, Milady tried to encourage Felton in his project, but she soon saw that the young fanatic required rather to be moderated than to be urged on.

It was agreed that Milady should wait for Felton until ten o'clock, and that if by ten he had not returned, she should sail alone.

In that case, supposing him to be free, he was to rejoin Milady in France, at the convent of the Carmelites of Béthune.

CHAPTER LVIII

WHAT HAPPENED AT PORTSMOUTH ON THE TWENTY-THIRD OF AUGUST, 1628

FELTON took leave of Milady, as a brother going for a simple stroll takes leave of his sister, kissing her hand.

He appeared quite as calm as usual, only an unaccustomed gleam shone in his eyes; his forehead was pale, his teeth were clenched, and his voice had a brief, curt accent, which denoted the gloom that was in his mind.

He entered Portsmouth at about eight in the morning. All the population was on foot; the drums were beating in the streets and in the port; the troops were marching down to the sea to embark.

Felton arrived at the Palace of the Admiralty, covered with dust, and streaming with perspiration; his face, usually so pale, was now purple with heat and anger.

The sentry would not let him pass, but Felton called the officer on guard, and showed him the letter of which he was the bearer.

"A pressing message from Lord de Winter," he said.

At the name of Lord de Winter the order was at once given to let Felton pass, and he darted into the palace.

At the same moment that he entered the vestibule, another man arrived, covered with dust, out of breath, leaving at the door a horse, which, on arriving, fell on its knees.

Felton and he addressed themselves at the same time to Patrick, the confidential valet of the Duke of Buckingham.

Felton named Lord de Winter, the stranger would name no one, and said that it was to the Duke alone that he could make himself known.

Patrick gave precedence to Lord de Winter's messenger.

The other man was obliged to wait, and it was easy to perceive how he cursed this delay.

Felton was conducted through the grand hall, in which were waiting the deputies of La Rochelle, headed by the Prince de Soubise, and ushered into a cabinet, where Buckingham was finishing his toilet, upon which he always bestowed extraordinary attention.

"Lieutenant Felton," said Patrick, "from Lord de Winter."

"From Lord de Winter!" repeated Buckingham. "Let him enter."

Felton entered. At that moment Buckingham was throwing upon a sofa a rich dressing-gown, worked in gold, to put on a doublet of blue velvet embroidered with pearls.

"Why did not the Baron come himself?" asked Buckingham. "I expected him this morning?"

"He told me to inform your Grace that he was obliged to remain at the Castle."

"Yes," said Buckingham; "I know that he has a prisoner."

"It is precisely of that prisoner that I wish to speak to your Grace."

"Well, speak!"

"What I have to say can be heard only by you, my lord."

"Leave us, Patrick," said Buckingham "but remain within sound of my bell; I will call you presently."

Patrick left the room.

"We are alone, sir," said Buckingham; "you can speak."

"My lord," said Felton, "Lord de Winter wrote to you the other day, begging you to sign an order relative to a young woman, called Charlotte Backson."

"Yes, sir; and I replied that if he would send me the order I would sign it."

"Here it is, my lord."

"Give it to me," said the Duke.

And taking it from the hands of Felton, he glanced over the paper. Then seeing that it was the order which had been announced, he laid it on the table and prepared to sign it.

"Pardon me, my lord," said Felton, interrupting the Duke; "does your Grace know that Charlotte Backson is not the real name of the young woman?"

"Yes, sir, I know it," said the Duke, dipping his pen in the ink.

"Then your Grace knows her real name?"

"I know it."

The Duke approached the pen to the paper. Felton grew pale.

"And, knowing it, you will sign it all the same?"

"Without any doubt," replied Buckingham; "and twice, rather than once."

"I cannot believe," said Felton, in a voice which became more and more abrupt, "that your Grace knows that it concerns Lady de Winter."

"I know it perfectly well, but I am astonished that you should know it."

"You shall not sign that order, my lord," cried Felton, taking a step toward the Duke.

"I shall not sign that order? And why?"

"Because, on consulting your conscience, you will do justice to Milady."

"It would be rendering her justice to send her to Tyburn. Milady is an infamous woman."

"My lord, Milady is an angel. You know that, and I ask you to grant her her liberty."

"Are you mad, to speak thus to me?" said Buckingham.

"My lord, excuse me; I speak as I can. I am restraining myself. However, reflect on what you are going to do."

"God forgive me!" cried Buckingham; "but I believe that you threaten me."

"No, my lord; I still implore; but I say that one drop suffices to make the cup run over when it is full; one more evil deed may draw down punishment on the head which has been spared in spite of so many crimes."

"Mr Felton," said Buckingham, "leave this room, and consider yourself under arrest."

"You must hear me to the end, my lord. You seduced that young girl! you outraged and defiled her! Atone for your crimes, allow her to depart freely, and I will exact nothing more from you."

"You will not exact!" said Buckingham, looking at Felton with astonishment.

"My lord," continued Felton, growing more excited as he went on, "take care; all England is growing weary of your iniquities! You have abused and usurped the royal authority. You are abhorred by men and by God. God will punish you later, but I shall punish you to-day."

"Ah, this is too much!" cried Buckingham, taking a step toward the door.

Felton barred the passage.

"Sign, my lord; sign the liberty of Lady de Winter!" said Felton, pushing a sheet of paper toward the Duke.

"By force? You are laughing! Ho, there! Patrick!"

"Sign, my lord!"

"Never!"

"Never?"

"Help!" cried the Duke, springing upon his sword.

But Felton did not give him time to draw it. He held ready open, in his breast, the knife with which Milady had stabbed herself; with one bound he was on the Duke.

At this moment Patrick entered, crying:

"My lord, a letter from France!"

"From France?" exclaimed Buckingham, forgetting everything at the thought from whom that letter came.

Felton seized the opportunity to plunge his knife up to the hilt in the Duke's side.

"Ah, traitor!" cried Buckingham; "you have killed me!"

"Murder!" shouted Patrick.

Felton looked round and prepared to flee; seeing a door open, he darted into a neighbouring room, which was that where the deputies from La Rochelle were waiting. He dashed toward the stairs, but on the first step he met Lord de Winter, who, seeing him livid, haggard, his hands and face stained with blood, caught him by the throat, exclaiming:

"I knew it. I guessed it a minute too late, unhappy man that I am!"

Felton offered no resistance.

Lord de Winter handed him over to the soldiers on guard.

At the cry uttered by the Duke, and Patrick's call, the man whom Felton had met in the anteroom darted into the cabinet.

He found the Duke lying on the sofa, pressing his hand upon his wound.

"La Porte," said the Duke, with a dying voice, "you come from her?"

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied the faithful messenger of Anne of Austria; "but perhaps too late!"

"Silence, La Porte, you might be overheard. Patrick, allow no one to enter! Oh, I shall not know what she had to say! My God, I am dying!"

And the Duke fainted.

Meanwhile Lord de Winter, the deputies, the chiefs of the expedition, and the officers of Buckingham's household, had forced their way into the room.

Cries of despair were heard on all sides.

The news which filled the palace with grief soon spread through the town.

The firing of a gun announced that something new and unexpected had taken place.

Lord de Winter tore his hair.

"Too late, by one minute!" he cried.

At seven o'clock he had been informed that a rope-ladder was floating from one of the windows of the castle.

He had rushed at once to Milady's room, which he had found

empty; remembering the verbal recommendation transmitted by the messenger from D'Artagnan, and trembling for the Duke, he had jumped upon a horse without waiting until it was saddled, and had galloped off.

As we have said, he had met Felton on the stairs.

However, the Duke was not dead. He recovered his senses, opened his eyes, and hope was restored to many hearts.

"Gentlemen," he said, "leave me alone with Patrick and La Porte. Ah, is that you, De Winter! You sent me a strange madman this morning; see in what a plight I am!"

"Oh, my lord, I shall never forgive myself!"

"And you will do wrong, De Winter," said Buckingham, holding out his hand. "But leave us, I beg of you."

The Baron went out, sobbing.

La Porte and Patrick remained alone with the Duke, while a doctor was being sought in vain.

"You will live, my lord; you will live," repeated the faithful servant of Anne of Austria, kneeling down before the sofa.

"What did she write to me?" said Buckingham feebly, streaming with blood, yet mastering his atrocious suffering, to speak of her whom he loved. "What has she written? Read me her letter."

La Porte broke the seal, and placed the parchment under the eyes of the Duke; but Buckingham in vain endeavoured to make out the writing.

"Read," he said, "read, I can no longer see; soon I shall be unable to hear, and shall die without knowing what she had written."

La Porte read

"My Lord,

"In the name of all that I have suffered, by and for you, since I knew you, I beg of you, if you have any care for my peace of mind, to interrupt the great preparations which you are making against France, and put an end to a war of which people say that religion is the pretence, and that your love for me is the real cause. This war may produce not only great catastrophes for France and for England, but also for you, my Lord, evils for which I should never console myself.

"Keep a watch on your life, which is threatened, and which will be dear to me from the moment that I am not obliged to see an enemy in you.

"Your affectionate

"Anne"

Buckingham mustered up his remaining strength to listen to this letter; then, when it was finished, as if bitterly disappointed:

"Have you nothing else to tell me by word of mouth, La Porte?" he said.

"Yes, my lord: the Queen ordered me to tell you that she still loves you."

"Ah!" exclaimed Buckingham. "God be praised! my death will not be for her the death of a stranger——"

La Porte burst into tears.

"Patrick," said the Duke, "bring me the casket where the diamond aiguillettes were enclosed."

Patrick brought the object asked for, which La Porte recognized as having belonged to the Queen.

"And now the white satin sachet on which her cipher is embroidered in pearls."

Patrick obeyed again.

"Here, La Porte, are the two only pledges that I held from her. You will return them to her Majesty, and as a last souvenir" (he looked round him for some precious object) "you will give her also——"

He looked again, but his eyes, obscured by death, encountered nothing but the knife which had fallen from the hands of Felton, and which still reeked with the crimson blood on the blade.

"And you will add that knife," said the Duke, pressing the hand of La Porte.

Then, in a last convulsion, the Duke rolled from the sofa on to the floor. Patrick uttered a loud cry.

Buckingham tried to smile once more, but death cut short the attempt. At this moment the Duke's doctor arrived, quite bewildered; he had already gone on board ship, whither they had gone for him.

He approached the Duke, took his hand, kept it for a moment in his, then, letting it fall, said:

"Nothing more can be done, he is dead."

"Dead, dead!" cried Patrick.

At this cry the crowd returned, and consternation and tumult reigned everywhere.

As soon as Lord de Winter saw Buckingham expire, he ran to Felton.

"Wretch!" he said, to the young man, who since he had stabbed Buckingham, had recovered his calm, which no more deserted him; "wretch! what have you done?"

"I have revenged myself."

"You!" said the Baron, "say rather, that you have acted as the instrument of that infamous woman. But I swear to you that this crime shall be her last."

"I know not what you mean," said Felton quietly, "and I know not of whom you speak, my lord. I killed Buckingham because he twice refused to make me a captain. That is all."

De Winter, amazed, looked at the men who were binding Felton. He was at a loss what to think of so much insensibility.

One thing, however, cast a shade over Felton's brow. At every sound he heard, the simple-minded Puritan thought that he recognized the step and the voice of Milady, coming to throw herself into his arms, to accuse herself, and to share his fate.

Suddenly he started, his eye was fixed on a spot in the sea; with the eagle glance of a sailor, he had recognized, where another would have seen merely a sea-gull rocking about on the waves, the sail of the sloop, which was steering for the coast of France.

He grew pale, and placed his hand on his breaking heart, as he realized Milady's treachery.

"One last favour, my lord," he said.

"What is it?" asked the Baron.

"What hour is it?"

"Ten minutes to nine," said the Baron.

Milady had advanced the hour of her departure; as soon as she had heard the gun which announced the fatal event she had given orders to weigh anchor.

The sloop was sailing under a blue sky at a long distance from the coast.

"God willed it," he said, with the resignation of a fanatic, but without being able to turn his eyes away from the ship, on board of which he no doubt thought that he could distinguish the white phantom of her for whom his life was about to be sacrificed.

De Winter followed his glance, and guessed everything.

"Be punished *alone* first of all, wretch," said Lord de Winter, "but I swear on the memory of my brother, who was dear to me, that your accomplice shall not escape."

Felton bowed his head without uttering a syllable.

As for De Winter, he rapidly descended the stairs and went down to the harbour.

CHAPTER LIX

IN FRANCE

THE first fear of the King of England, Charles I, on learning this death was that the terrible news would discourage the Rochelais.

"He tried," says Richelieu in his *Memoirs*, "to hide it from them as long as possible, ordering all the ports of the kingdom to be closed, and taking care that no vessel should sail until the army which Buckingham had prepared had left."

He carried the severity of this order so far as to detain the ambassadors of Denmark, who had taken leave, and the Dutch ambassador who was going to take back to Flushing the Indiamen which Charles I had caused to be restored to the United Provinces.

But as this order was not given until five hours after the event, two ships had already sailed; one carrying, as we know, Milady, who suspected what had happened, and whose suspicions were confirmed on seeing a flag half-masted on board the admiral's vessel. As for the second ship we shall say hereafter who was on board and why it sailed.

During this time there was nothing new in the camp of La Rochelle; only the King, who was more bored than usual, had made up his mind to pass the *fête* of St Louis incognito at Saint-Germain, and had asked the Cardinal to order him an escort of twenty musketeers only.

The Cardinal, who was sometimes as much bored as his Majesty, willingly granted this furlough to his royal lieutenant, who promised to be back by September 15.

M. de Tréville, told off by his Eminence, packed up; and as, without being aware of the cause, he knew that his friends greatly wished to return to Paris, he ordered them to form part of the escort.

The four young men learned this news a quarter of an hour after M. de Tréville. It is hardly necessary to say that this impatience to return to Paris was caused by the danger which Madame Bonacieux would run on meeting Milady, her deadly enemy, at the convent of Béthune. Therefore, as we have said, Aramis had immediately written to Marie Michon, of Tours, who had such fine acquaintances, to obtain an authorization from the Queen for Madame Bonacieux to leave the convent, and to withdraw either to Lorraine or to Belgium.

The reply was not long in coming; a week afterward Aramis received the following letter:

MY DEAR COUSIN,

Here is the authorization of my sister to take away our little servant from the convent of Béthune, the air of which you think is bad for her. My sister sends you this authorization with great pleasure, for she has a great affection for the little girl, to whom she hopes to be useful hereafter.

I embrace you

MARIE MICHON

To this letter was joined the authorization in these terms

The abbess of the convent of Béthune will hand over to the bearer of this note the novice who entered the convent on my recommendation and under my patronage.

ANNE

AT THE LOUVRE,
August, 10, 1628

One can understand how the relationship between Aramis and a dressmaker, who called the Queen sister, amused the young men; but Aramis, after having blushed up to his eyes two or three times at the coarse jokes of Porthos, begged his friends to drop the subject, declaring that if they said any more he would never again employ his cousin in such affairs. The name of Marie Michon was therefore no more mentioned.

The valets were sent on before with the baggage, and the musketeers marched on the 16th. The Cardinal accompanied his Majesty to Mauzé, and there the King and the minister took leave of each other with great demonstrations of friendship.

However, the King, who desired to amuse himself while travelling as fast as possible, for he wished to arrive in Paris for the 23rd, stopped from time to time to fly a magpie—a pastime which De Luynes had taught him, and for which he afterward showed a great predilection.

At last the escort passed through Paris on the night of the 23rd.

The King thanked M. de Tréville, and permitted him to distribute furloughs of four days on condition that none of those favoured should appear in a public place under pain of the Bastille.

The four first furloughs were granted to our four friends; and

what was more, Athos obtained from M. de Tréville six days instead of four, and two nights besides.

"Why!" said D'Artagnan, "we are making a great fuss about a small matter; in two days, if I kill a few horses on the road, I can reach Béthune, hand my letter to the abbess, and bring back my treasure to Paris, where she will be well hidden while the Cardinal is at La Rochelle. Remain here, then, and do not fatigue yourselves; I and Planchet suffice for such an expedition."

To this Athos quietly replied:

"Remember that Béthune is a town to which the Cardinal has sent a woman who, wherever she goes, brings misfortune in her train. If you had only to deal with four men, D'Artagnan, I would let you go alone; you have to deal with this woman; let us all four go, and, please God, with our four valets we shall be sufficiently numerous."

"You alarm me, Athos," cried D'Artagnan; "what can you fear?"

"Everything," replied Athos.

D'Artagnan examined the faces of his companions, which, like that of Athos, showed signs of great uneasiness; and they rode quickly along without exchanging another word.

On the evening of the 25th, as they were entering Arras, and as D'Artagnan was alighting at the inn of the Herse d'Or to drink a glass of wine, a horseman rode out of the courtyard, and set out at a gallop on the road to Paris. As he passed through the gate the wind blew open the cloak in which he had wrapped himself, although it was the month of August, and nearly blew off his hat.

D'Artagnan, who had his eyes fixed on this man, turned pale and dropped his glass.

"What is the matter, sir?" asked Planchet. "Oh! come quickly, gentlemen, my master is fainting!"

The three friends hastened to the spot, and found D'Artagnan, who, far from fainting, was running for his horse. They stopped him at the door.

"Well, where the devil are you going like that?" said Athos.

"It is he!" cried D'Artagnan, pale with rage—"it is he; let me go after him!"

"But who is he?" asked Athos.

"That accursed man, my evil genius, whom I always see when some danger threatens; he who accompanied that horrible woman the first time that I met her; he whom I was looking for

when I challenged our friend Athos ; he whom I saw on the day that Madame Bonacieux was carried off ! I saw him ; it is he ! "

" *Diable !* " said Athos musingly.

" To horse, gentlemen, to horse ; let us pursue him."

" Remember," said Aramis, " that he is going in the opposite direction to that in which we are going ; that he has a fresh horse, while ours are tired, and that we should kill our horses without catching him. Let us leave the man alone, D'Artagnan, and let us save the woman."

" Eh, sir ! " cried a stable boy, running after the stranger, " here is a paper which fell out of your hat."

" My friend," said D'Artagnan, " half a pistole for that paper."

" With the greatest pleasure, sir ; here it is."

" Well ? " asked his friends who surrounded D'Artagnan as he opened the paper.

" Nothing but one word ! " said D'Artagnan.

" Yes," said Aramis ; " but it is the name of a town or of a village."

" *Armentières*," read Porthos ; " I do not know it."

" And this name is in her handwriting," cried Athos.

" Let us take care of that paper," said D'Artagnan ; " perhaps I have not wasted that pistole after all ! To horse, my friends, to horse."

And the four companions set out at a gallop along the road to Béthune.

CHAPTER LX

THE CARMELITE CONVENT OF BÉTHUNE

GREAT criminals seem gifted with a kind of predestination which make them surmount every obstacle and escape all dangers up to the moment which Providence has marked out as the limit of their impious run of good luck.

It was so with Milady ; she passed amid the cruisers of both nations, and arrived at Boulogne without any accident.

On landing at Portsmouth, Milady was an English woman whom persecution had driven from La Rochelle ; on landing at Boulogne, she became a French woman who was unable to remain at Portsmouth in consequence of the hatred against France.

Milady had besides the most efficacious of passports ; her beauty, her noble bearing, and the generosity with which she flung

her gold about. Freed from the usual formalities by the old Governor of the port who kissed her hand, she remained at Boulogne only long enough to post a letter thus conceived :

To his Eminence the Cardinal de Richelieu, in his camp before La Rochelle

MONSEIGNEUR,

Let your Eminence be reassured ; his Grace the Duke of Buckingham will not sail for France.

MILADY DE ——

BOULOGNE, *25th*

P.S.—According to the wishes of your Eminence, I am going to the convent of the Carmelites at Béthune, to await your orders.

On the same evening Milady took the road. Darkness overtook her ; she stopped and slept at an inn, and the next morning set out for Béthune.

On entering the convent of the Carmelites she was met by the abbess. Milady showed her the Cardinal's order ; the abbess had her shown to a room where breakfast was served.

After breakfast the abbess came to pay her a visit ; there is little variety in a convent, and the good Superioress was anxious to make the acquaintance of her new guest.

Milady wished to please the abbess, an easy task for this really talented woman ; she was charming, and seduced the good Superioress by her varied conversation and the grace which pervaded her entire person.

But she was somewhat embarrassed, not knowing whether the abbess was a Royalist or a Cardinalist. She determined to risk something in order to solve the question. Wishing to see how far the discretion of the abbess would go, she began to speak ill of the Cardinal, relating his intrigues. Then she passed on to the manner in which the Cardinal persecuted his enemies. The abbess merely made the sign of the Cross, neither approving nor disapproving. This confirmed Milady in the idea that the abbess was rather a Royalist than a Cardinalist, and she continued giving more and more colour to her narrative.

" I am very ignorant in all those matters," said the abbess ; " but distant as we are from the Courts, placed as we are beyond the sphere of earthly interests, we have very sad examples of what you relate ; and one of our inmates has suffered greatly from the vengeance and persecution of the Cardinal."

" One of your inmates ! Poor woman ; how I pity her ! "

" Allow me to express my surprise, madame," said the abbess.

" Concerning what ? " asked Milady, with simplicity.

" Concerning the language you make use of."

" What do you find astonishing in it ? "

" You are a friend of the Cardinal, since he sends you here, and, yet——"

" And yet I speak ill of him ! "

" At least you say nothing good of him."

" That is because I am not his friend, but his victim."

" But this letter in which you are recommended to me ?

" Is an order for me to remain in a sort of prison until he releases me."

" But why did you not fly ? "

" Where should I go ? Do you believe that there is a spot in the world which the Cardinal cannot reach by stretching out his arm ? The young woman whom you have here, did she attempt to escape ? "

" No, that is true ; but it is another thing with her. I believe that some love-affair binds her to France."

" Then," said Milady, with a sigh, " if she loves, she is not quite unhappy."

" Then," said the abbess, with increasing interest, " it is a poor persecuted woman that I see before me ? "

" Alas, yes," said Milady.

The abbess looked uneasily at Milady, as if a new idea had suggested itself.

" You are not an enemy to our holy faith ? " she stammered.

" I ? " cried Milady, " I a Protestant ? Oh, no ; I call God to witness that I am a fervent Catholic."

" Then, madame, make your mind easy ; the house in which you are will not be a very severe prison, and we shall do all we can to make you like your captivity. What is more, you will find here the young woman who is persecuted, no doubt for some Court intrigue. She is amiable and good-natured."

" What is her name ? "

" She was recommended to me by some one in a very high position under the name of Kitty."

" Kitty ! " exclaimed Milady ; " what, are you sure ? "

" That she is so called ? Yes, madame ; do you know her ? "

Milady smiled at the idea of this young woman being her late chambermaid. The remembrance of this girl aroused such a feeling of rage and such a desire for revenge, that Milady's features

were distorted ; but she soon recovered the calm she had momentarily lost.

" And when shall I be able to see this young lady for whom I already feel so much sympathy ? " she asked.

" This evening," replied the abbess ; " or during the day. But as you have been travelling for four days, you must stand in need of rest. Go to bed and sleep ; we will wake you at dinner-time."

Although Milady could very well have done without sleep, she nevertheless accepted the offer of the abbess. During the last fortnight she had passed through so many different emotions that, if her iron constitution could stand more fatigue, her mind required rest.

She took leave of the abbess and went to bed, gently lulled by those ideas of revenge which the name of Kitty had naturally awakened. She remembered the almost unlimited promise which the Cardinal had made her in the event of success. She had succeeded, and therefore D'Artagnan was hers.

She was awakened by a gentle voice at her bedside. She opened her eyes and saw the abbess accompanied by a young woman with fair hair and a delicate complexion, who fixed her eyes upon her with an expression of kindly curiosity.

The face of the young woman was completely unknown to her ; they both examined each other with scrupulous attention while exchanging the usual compliments. Both were very pretty, but their style of beauty was different.

However, Milady smiled on recognizing that she greatly surpassed the young woman in breeding and aristocratic bearing. It is true that the dress of a novice, which the young woman wore, put the latter at a disadvantage.

The abbess introduced them to each other ; and when the formality had been gone through, she left the two young women together to attend to her duties in the church.

" Well ! " said Milady, " a pleasant awakening, and this I owe to you."

And taking the novice by the hand, she drew her to an arm-chair close to her bed. The novice sat down.

" Dear me ! " said she, " how unhappy I am ! I have been here for six months without the shadow of an amusement ; you arrive ; your presence was about to afford me a charming companionship, and now, according to all probability, I am going to leave the convent."

" What ! you are about to leave ? "

"At least I hope so," said the novice, with a joy she did not attempt to disguise.

"I learn that you have suffered at the hands of the Cardinal; that would have been another motive for sympathy between us."

"What the good abbess has told me is then true, that you also are a victim of that wicked priest."

"Hush!" said Milady; "even here you must not speak about him like that; all my misfortunes came from speaking as you have just spoken, in the presence of a woman whom I considered as a friend, and who betrayed me. And you also are the victim of treachery?"

"No," said the novice; "but of my devotion—devotion to a woman I loved, for whom I would have given my life, for whom I would still give it."

"And who has abandoned you, is that it?"

"I was sufficiently unjust to think so, but within the last few days I have obtained proof to the contrary, and I thank God for it: it would have cost me a great deal to think that she had forgotten me. But you, madame," continued the novice, "it appears to me that you are free, and that you can fly if you like."

"Where to? without friends, without money, in a part of France which I do not know."

"Hark!" said the novice, "you must put faith in Heaven; there always comes a moment when the good you have done pleads your cause before God; perhaps it is fortunate for you to have met me, humble and powerless though I am: for if I go hence, I shall have powerful friends, who, after releasing me, will perhaps release you."

"Oh! when I said that I was quite alone," said Milady, in the hope of making the novice talk, "it is not that I have no acquaintances in a high position; but they themselves tremble before the Cardinal; the Queen herself does not dare to oppose the terrible minister. I have the proof that her Majesty, in spite of her excellent heart, has been more than once obliged to abandon those who have served her to the wrath of his Eminence."

"Believe me, madame, the Queen may seem to have abandoned them, but you must not trust to appearances; the more they are persecuted, the more she thinks of them."

"Alas! I believe you," said Milady, "the Queen is so good."

"Oh! then you know her, that lovely and noble Queen, since you speak thus of her?" cried the novice with enthusiasm.

" That is to say," replied Milady, driven into a corner, " I have not the honour of knowing her personally, but I know a good number of her intimate friends ; I know M. de Putange ; in England I knew M. Dujart ; I know M. de Tréville."

" M. de Tréville ! " exclaimed the novice ; " you know M. de Tréville ? "

" Yes, perfectly well."

" Oh ! but we shall soon become almost friends," cried the novice ; " if you know M. de Tréville, you must have been to his *hôtel* ? "

" Often," said Milady, who, seeing that a falsehood had succeeded, wished to go on to the end.

" At his *hôtel* you must have met some of his musketeers ? "

" All those whom he received habitually," replied Milady, who began to take a real interest in the conversation.

" Name me some of those whom you know, and you will see that they are my friends."

" Well," said Milady, embarrassed, " I know M. de Souvigny, M. de Courtivron, M. de Férussac, ——"

The novice allowed her to speak, then, seeing that she stopped :

" You do not know,"said she, " a gentleman named Athos ? "

Milady became as pale as the sheets between which she was lying, and in spite of her self-control, she could not help uttering a cry, seizing the hand of the novice and gazing at her anxiously.

" What is the matter ? Have I said anything to hurt your feelings ? " asked the young woman.

" No, but the name struck me, because I also knew that gentleman, and it appeared strange to meet a person who knows him well."

" Oh, yes, very well ; not only him, but his friends, Porthos and Aramis."

" I know them too," said Milady, who felt her very heart grow cold.

" Well, if you know them, you must know that they are good and bold companions ; why do you not appeal to them if you require help ? "

" That is to say," stammered Milady, " I am not really on intimate terms with any of them ; I know them from having heard them spoken of by one of their friends, M. d'Artagnan."

" You know M. d'Artagnan ? " cried the novice in her turn, seizing the hand of Milady and gazing fixedly at her.

Then remarking a strange expression in Milady's eyes :

" Pardon me, madame," she said, " you know him, in what way ? "

" As a friend," replied Milady greatly embarrassed.

" You deceive me, madame," said the novice ; " you were his mistress."

" It is you who were his mistress, madame," cried Milady, in her turn.

" I ! " exclaimed the novice.

" Yes, you. I know you now ; you are Madame Bonacieux."

The young woman drew back filled with surprise and terror.

" Oh ! do not deny it. Answer," said Milady.

" Well, yes, madame," replied the novice ; " are we rivals ? "

The face of Milady was illuminated by so savage a flame that under any other circumstances Madame Bonacieux would have fled in affright ; but she was wholly engrossed in her jealousy.

" Speak, madame," rejoined Madame Bonacieux, with an amount of energy of which no one would have thought her capable ; " you were, you are his mistress ? "

" Oh, no ! " cried Milady in an accent which carried conviction ; " never ! never ! "

" I believe you," said Madame Bonacieux ; " but then why did you cry out so ? "

" Why, do you not understand ? " said Milady, who had recovered her presence of mind.

" How can I understand ? "

" Do you not understand that, being the friend of M. d'Artagnan, he took me into his confidence ? "

" Really ! "

" Do you not understand that I know everything : how you were carried off from the little house at Saint-Germain, his despair, that of his friends, their search, useless up to this moment. And how could you expect me not to be astonished on finding myself suddenly in your presence, you, of whom we have so often spoken together ; you, whom he loves with the whole strength of his soul ; you, whom he made me love before I saw you ! Ah ! dear Constance, I have found you, then ; I see you at last ! "

And Milady stretched out her arms to Madame Bonacieux, who, convinced by what she had said, saw in the woman she had looked upon a moment before as a rival, only a sincere and devoted friend.

" Oh, pardon me ! pardon me ! " she cried, falling on her neck, " I love him so dearly ! "

These two women remained a moment in each other's embrace.

Certainly, if the strength of Milady had been on a par with her hatred, Madame Bonacieux would have been crushed in that embrace; but not being able to crush her, Milady smiled.

"O my dear," said Milady, "how happy I am to see you! Let me look at you. Yes, it is really you. Ah! after all that he has told me I recognize you perfectly."

The poor young woman little suspected the amount of cruelty lurking behind that pure forehead and those brilliant eyes, which seemed to be beaming with interest and compassion.

"Then you know what I have suffered," said Madame Bonacieux, "since he told you what he suffered. But to suffer for him is happiness."

"Yes, it is happiness," replied Milady mechanically. She was thinking of something else.

"And then," continued Madame Bonacieux, "my anguish is nearly over; to-morrow, or perhaps to-day, I shall see him."

"This evening! to-morrow!" cried Milady, aroused from her reverie by these words; "what do you mean? Do you expect news of him?"

"I expect him himself."

"Himself! D'Artagnan here! It is impossible! He is at the siege of La Rochelle with the Cardinal, and will not return till the town is taken."

"You believe so; but nothing is impossible for my D'Artagnan."

"Oh! I cannot believe you!"

"Well, then, read this," said the unfortunate young woman, in a fit of pride and joy, presenting a letter to Milady.

"The writing of Madame de Chevreuse," said Milady to herself. "Ah! I was sure that there was plotting on that side!"

And she read with avidity the following lines:

My dear Child,

Hold yourself in readiness; *our friend* will see you soon, and he will see you in order to deliver you from the prison where your safety rendered it necessary that you should be hidden. Prepare to leave then, and never despair of us.

Our charming Gascon has just shown himself brave and faithful as ever; tell him that some one is very grateful for the warning which he has given.

"Yes, yes," said Milady, "that letter is very plain. Do you know what the warning was?"

" No. I suppose, however, that he must have given the Queen warning of some new machination on the part of the Cardinal."

" Yes, no doubt that's it," said Milady, returning the letter to Madame Bonacieux, and allowing her head to fall pensively on her bosom.

At this moment the gallop of a horse was heard.

" Oh ! " cried Madame Bonacieux, running to the window, " can it be he ? "

Milady had remained in bed, paralysed by surprise ; so many unexpected things were happening one after the other that, for the first time, she lost her head.

" He, he ! " she murmured ; " can it be he ? "

And she remained in bed with vacant eyes.

" Alas, no ! " said Madame Bonacieux. " It is a man that I do not know, and who, however, seems to be coming here. Yes, he is stopping at the gate, and ringing."

Milady jumped out of bed.

The door opened, and the Superioress made her appearance.

" Have you come from Boulogne ? " she asked Milady.

" Yes," replied the latter, trying to recover her self-possession ; " who asks for me ? "

" A man who declines to give his name, but who says that he comes on the part of the Cardinal."

" Then I beg you will allow him to enter, madame ? "

" Oh ! " cried Madame Bonacieux ; " can it be some bad news ? "

" I fear so."

" I shall leave you with this stranger ; but I hope that, as soon as he has gone, you will allow me to return ? "

" I beg you will do so."

The Superioress and Madame Bonacieux left the room.

Milady remained alone, her eyes fixed on the door.

A moment later she heard the jingle of spurs ; then the door opened, and a man appeared.

Milady uttered a cry of joy. This man was the Comte de Rochefort, the *âme damnée* of his Eminence.

CHAPTER LXI

TWO VARIETIES OF DEMONS

"AH!" cried Rochefort and Milady together; "it is you!"

"And you have come?" asked Milady.

"From La Rochelle. And you?"

"From England."

"Buckingham?"

"Dead, or dangerously wounded. As I was starting, a fanatic assassinated him."

"A lucky chance, which will greatly please his Eminence," said Rochefort with a smile. "Have you sent him the news?"

"I wrote to him from Boulogne. But how came you here?"

"His Eminence, who was uneasy, sent me to look for you."

"I arrived yesterday only. Do you know whom I met here?"

"No."

"That young woman whom the Queen released from prison."

"The mistress of that little D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, Madame Bonacieux, whose hiding-place the Cardinal did not know. Can you understand my astonishment when I found myself face to face with that woman?"

"Does she know you?"

"No."

"Then she looks upon you as a stranger?"

"I am her best friend," said Milady, smiling.

"On my honour, you are the only person to accomplish such miracles, my dear Countess."

"And I did well," said Milady. "They are coming for her to-morrow, or the day after, with an order from the Queen."

"Really! And who?"

"D'Artagnan and his friends."

"They will do so much that we shall be obliged to shut them up in the Bastille."

"Why is it not done already?"

"Because the Cardinal has a weakness for those men which I cannot understand."

"Well, tell him this, Rochefort: that our conversation at the Colombier Rouge was overheard by those four men; tell him that after his departure, one of them came upstairs and took away from me, by violence, the safe-conduct he had given me; tell him that they warned Lord de Winter of my journey to England;

that this time again they almost caused the failure of my mission, as in the affair of the diamonds; tell him that among the four two only are to be feared, D'Artagnan and Athos; that the third, Aramis, is the lover of Madame de Chevreuse; as for the fourth, Porthos, he is a fool, a fop, who deserves no attention."

"But these four men should be at present at the siege of La Rochelle."

"I thought so too; but a letter from Madame de Chevreuse, which Madame Bonacieux had the imprudence to show me, leads me to think that they are on their way here to release her."

"*Diable!* What is to be done?"

"What did the Cardinal say respecting me?"

"To take your dispatches, verbal or written, and return at once; when he knows what you have done, he will consider what you should do."

"Then I must remain here?"

"Here, or in the neighbourhood."

"You could not take me with you?"

"No; the order is strict; you might be recognized in the neighbourhood of the camp, and your presence would compromise his Eminence."

"It is probable that I shall not be able to remain here."

"Why?"

"You forget that my enemies may arrive at any moment."

"That is true. Then that little woman will escape his Eminence?"

"Nay!" said Milady, with a peculiar smile; "you forget that I am her best friend."

"Then I can tell the Cardinal, with regard to this woman——"

"That he may be quite at his ease."

"Now, what am I to do?"

"Start this moment. It appears to me that the news you convey deserves diligence."

"My post-chaise broke down on entering Lilliers."

"Excellent!"

"How excellent?"

"Yes; I require your post-chaise myself."

"And how shall I leave here?"

"On horseback."

"You speak at your ease; an hundred and eighty leagues."

"What is that?"

"I will ride them. Next?"

"Next, on passing through Lilliers, you will send me your

servant, with orders to place himself at my disposal. You have no doubt some order of the Cardinal about you ? "

" I have full powers."

" You will show them to the abbess, saying that some one will come and fetch me to-day or to-morrow, and that I am to follow the person who presents himself in your name."

" Very good."

" Do not forget to talk harshly of me in speaking to the abbess."

" What will be the good of that ? "

" I am the victim of the Cardinal. I must inspire that poor little Madame Bonacieux with confidence."

" You are right. Now will you make out a report of what has passed ? "

" But I have related the events to you. You have a good memory ; repeat the things as I have told them ; a paper gets lost."

" Only let me know where to find you."

" Let me think a minute—at Armentières."

" Write the name down on a piece of paper, lest I should forget it ; the name of a town is not compromising."

" Good," said Rochefort, taking the paper, folding it, and placing it in his hat. " Now is that all ? "

" I believe so."

" Let us go over it again : Buckingham dead or seriously wounded ; your conversation with the Cardinal overheard by the four musketeers ; Lord de Winter warned of your arrival in England ; D'Artagnan and Athos to the Bastille ; Aramis the lover of Madame de Chevreuse ; Porthos a fop ; Madame Bonacieux discovered ; send you the post-chaise as soon as possible ; make you out the victim of the Cardinal in speaking to the abbess ; Armentières. Is that it ? "

" Of a truth, chevalier, you have a wonderful memory. Add one thing."

" What is it ? "

" There is a nice wood behind the convent ; say that I have permission to walk there. I might require to get out by a back door."

" You think of everything."

" And you forget one thing."

" Which ? "

" To ask me if I have any money."

" That is true ; how much do you require ? "

"All that you have in gold."

"I have about five hundred pistoles."

"I have about as much. With a thousand pistoles one can do anything; empty your pockets."

"There. Adieu, Countess."

"Recommend me to the Cardinal."

"Recommend me to Satan."

Milady and Rochefort exchanged a smile and separated.

Five hours afterward he rode through Arras, where, as we have already seen, he was recognized by D'Artagnan.

CHAPTER LXII

THE DROP OF WATER

ROCHEFORT had hardly left the room, when Madame Bonacieux entered.

She found Milady with a smiling countenance.

"Well," said the young woman, "what you feared has happened, then; this evening or to-morrow the Cardinal will send for you."

"Who told you that, my dear?" asked Milady.

"I heard it from the lips of the messenger."

"Come and sit down near me," said Milady.

"Here I am."

"The man who presented himself to the abbess as the messenger of the Cardinal is my brother."

"Your brother!" exclaimed Madame Bonacieux.

"Listen, this is what is passing: my brother, who came here to carry me off by force, if necessary, met the emissary of the Cardinal, who was coming in quest of me; he followed him, and in a dark and solitary part of the road he called on the messenger to give up his papers. The messenger tried to defend himself: my brother killed him."

"Oh!" exclaimed Madame Bonacieux with a shudder.

"There was no other way. My brother then determined to resort to cunning instead of to force. He took the papers, and presented himself as the emissary of the Cardinal, and in an hour or two a carriage will come to fetch me on behalf of his Eminence."

"I understand; it is your brother who will send the carriage."

"Just so; but that is not all. That letter which you received,

and which you supposed to be from Madame de Chevreuse, is a forgery. It is a trap to prevent you from making any resistance when they come for you."

"But it is D'Artagnan who is coming."

"Undeceive yourself; D'Artagnan and his friends are at the siege of La Rochelle."

"How do you know all that?"

"My brother met the emissaries of the Cardinal, disguised as musketeers. They would have called you to the gate, you would have thought that they were friends, and they would have carried you off, and have taken you back to Paris."

"Oh, my God! I shall lose my reason in this chaos of iniquity. If this continues I shall go mad."

"Wait——"

"What?"

"I hear a horse; it is my brother, who is going away. I wish to say one last word to him. Come."

Milady opened the window, and made a sign to Madame Bonacieux to join her.

Rochefort passed at a gallop.

"Good-bye, brother," cried Milady.

The horseman raised his head, and, seeing the two women, made a friendly sign to Milady with his hand.

"Dear George!" she said, with an expression of affection and melancholy.

She then shut the window, and, returning to her seat, seemed wrapped in thought.

"Dear lady," said Madame Bonacieux, "forgive me for interrupting you, but what would you advise me to do? You have much more experience than I have."

"First of all," said Milady, "I may be mistaken, and perhaps M. d'Artagnan and his friends are really coming to your aid."

"Oh, that would have been too good," cried Madame Bonacieux, "and so much happiness is not reserved for me."

"In that case, understand, it will be simply a race. If your friends arrive first, you will be saved; if the satellites of the Cardinal, you will be lost."

"Oh, yes, lost, lost beyond redemption! Then what must be done?"

"There remains only one thing, very natural——"

"Which? Tell me."

"To remain concealed in the neighbourhood until you can make sure who the men are who come to fetch you."

"But where could I wait?"

"Oh, there is no difficulty about that. I am going to stop in hiding a few leagues from here, while waiting for my brother. Well, if I take you with me, we will hide together."

"But they will not allow me to leave; I am almost a prisoner."

"As they believe that I am leaving on an order from the Cardinal, they will not suppose you very anxious to follow me. When the carriage is at the door, you will say good-bye to me; you will get on the step to clasp me in your arms once more; my brother's servant will be forewarned, he will make a sign to the postilion, and we shall gallop away."

"But D'Artagnan! If D'Artagnan arrives?"

"Shall we not know all about it?"

"How?"

"Nothing easier. On reaching Béthune we will send back my brother's servant; he will disguise himself, and lodge opposite the convent. If the emissaries of the Cardinal arrive he will not stir; if M. d'Artagnan and his friends arrive he will bring them to us."

"He knows them?"

"Of course. Has he not seen M. d'Artagnan at my house?"

"Oh! yes, yes, you are right; but do not let us go far from here."

"Seven or eight leagues at the most. We will remain on the frontier, so as to be able to leave France on the first symptom of danger."

"And what shall we do till then?"

"Wait."

"But if they arrive?"

"My brother's carriage will arrive before them."

"But if I am not with you when they come to fetch you—if I am at dinner or at supper?"

"Ask the good Superioress to allow you to share my meals."

"Capital! In that way we shall not leave each other for a moment."

"Well, go down and make your request; my head is so oppressed that I shall go and take a stroll in the garden."

"And where shall I find you?"

"Here in an hour."

"Oh! how kind you are! and how I thank you!"

"How would it be possible for me not to take an interest in you, even if you were not so pretty and charming? Are you not the friend of one of my dearest friends?"

"Dear D'Artagnan, how he will thank you!"

"I should hope so. Well, all is arranged; let us go down."

And the two women separated, exchanging a sweet smile.

Milady had spoken the truth; her head was heavy, being full of ill-digested plans. She required to be alone to arrange her ideas, and to look into the future.

Her main object was to keep Madame Bonacieux in her clutches. Madame Bonacieux represented the life of D'Artagnan; she was more than his life, she was the woman he loved—she was, should things come to the worst, a means of treating for, and of obtaining good conditions.

This much was decided. Madame Bonacieux, without suspicion, would follow her; once hidden with her at Armentières it would be easy to make her believe that D'Artagnan had never come to Béthune. In a fortnight Rochefort would be back, and during that time she would reflect over what was to be done to revenge herself on the four friends.

At the end of an hour she heard a soft voice calling her—it was that of Madame Bonacieux. The good abbess had consented to everything, and for a start they were going to sup together.

On reaching the courtyard they heard the noise of a carriage stopping at the gate.

Milady listened.

"Do you hear?" she asked.

"Yes; the wheels of a carriage."

"It is that which my brother has sent."

"Oh, my God!"

"Come, have courage!"

There was a ring at the gate of the convent. Milady was not mistaken.

"Go up to your room," said Milady; "you have no doubt some jewels which you would like to take with you."

"I have his letters," she said.

"Well, go and get them, and come back here; we will take a hasty supper; perhaps we shall travel a portion of the night, we must keep up our strength."

"Ah!" exclaimed Madame Bonacieux, placing her hand on her bosom, "my heart beats so that I cannot walk."

"Courage! courage! only think that in a quarter of an hour you will be saved; and remember that what you are going to do is for his sake."

"Oh, yes, anything for him! That has restored me all my courage. I will join you in a moment."

Milady went up to her room, where she found Rochefort's servant, and gave him his instructions.

He was to wait at the gate ; if by chance the musketeers made their appearance, he was to gallop away, and to wait for Milady at a small village on the other side of the wood. If the musketeers did not appear, matters were to proceed as agreed upon.

Madame Bonacieux entered ; and to remove any suspicions which she might have, Milady repeated the last part of her instructions in her presence. She then asked some questions concerning the carriage, which was drawn by three horses, and preceded by an outrider.

Milady was wrong in supposing that Madame Bonacieux conceived any suspicions—the poor young woman was too ingenuous to suspect so much perfidy in a lady ; besides, the name of Countess de Winter, which she had heard the abbess pronounce, was quite unknown to her, nor was she even aware that a woman had had anything to do with the misfortunes of her life.

" You see," said Milady, when the servant had left the room, " everything is ready. The abbess suspects nothing. This man has gone to give the last orders ; take something to eat, drink a glass of wine, and let us start."

" Yes," said Madame Bonacieux mechanically, " let us start."

Milady made a sign to her to sit down while she poured her out some wine, and gave her the wing of a chicken.

" See," she said, " how everything favours us ; here is night coming on ; by daybreak we shall have arrived at our refuge, and no one will suspect where we are."

Madame Bonacieux swallowed a few mouthfuls, and wet her lips in her glass.

" Come, come ! " said Milady, raising her glass, " do as I do."

But as she raised it to her lips she stayed her hand ; she heard the gallop of horses in the distance. This noise disturbed her as the noise of a storm awakens one from a pleasant dream ; she grew pale, and rushed to the window, while Madame Bonacieux, trembling all over, leaned against a chair not to fall. There was nothing to be seen, but they could hear the sound of galloping drawing nearer.

" Oh, my God ! " cried Madame Bonacieux, " what is that noise ? "

" That of our friends, or of our enemies," said Milady, with terrible coolness ; " stay where you are, I will tell you."

Madame Bonacieux remained standing, motionless, and pale as a statue.

The noise became louder ; the horses could not be more than a hundred yards away.

Milady looked with the greatest attention ; it was just light enough for her to distinguish those who were coming. Suddenly, at the turning of the road, she saw laced hats and waving plumes. She counted first two, then five, then eight horsemen ; one of them was two lengths ahead of the others.

Milady uttered a stifled groan ; she had recognized D'Artagnan.

" Oh, my God ! " exclaimed Madame Bonacieux, " what is the matter ? "

" It is the uniform of the Cardinal ; there is not a moment to lose ; let us fly ! " cried Milady.

" Yes, yes, let us fly ! " repeated Madame Bonacieux, but without being able to move a step, nailed to the spot as she was by terror.

" Come, then, come ! " cried Milady, endeavouring to drag the young woman along by the arm. " By the garden we can escape, I have the key ; but make haste, in five minutes it will be too late."

Madame Bonacieux tried to walk, took two steps, then fell on her knees.

Milady endeavoured to raise her up and carry her away, but she could not accomplish this.

The noise of the carriage was heard ; at the sight of the musketeers it was driving away at a gallop. Then three or four shots were fired.

" For the last time, will you come ? " cried Milady.

" Oh, my God ! you see that my strength fails me, and that I cannot walk ; fly alone."

" Fly alone ! leave you here ; no, never ! " exclaimed Milady.

Suddenly she stood up with flashing eyes ; she rushed to the table, poured into the glass of Madame Bonacieux some reddish substance, which was contained in her ring.

" Drink," she said ; " this wine will give you strength."

And she put the glass to the lips of the young woman, who drank it mechanically.

" Ah ! it is not thus that I wished to revenge myself," said Milady, with an infernal smile, " but, *ma foi*, one must do what one can." And she darted out of the room.

Madame Bonacieux saw her fly without being able to follow her ; she was like a person who dreams that he is pursued, and who vainly attempts to run away.

A minute later there was a terrible noise at the door; at each moment Madame Bonacieux expected to see Milady reappear. Several times, through terror perhaps, a cold sweat broke out over her forehead, which seemed on fire.

At last she heard the creaking of the gate being opened, the noise of boots and spurs re-echoed on the stairs; there was a murmur of voices, and she thought that she heard her name pronounced. Suddenly she uttered a cry of joy, and darted to the door; she had recognized the voice of D'Artagnan.

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan! it is you? here, here?"

"Constance! Constance!" replied the young man, "where are you?"

At the same moment the door of the cell burst open; several men rushed into the chamber; Madame Bonacieux had fallen into an armchair, unable to make a movement.

D'Artagnan threw aside his pistol, which was still smoking, and fell on his knees before his mistress. Athos replaced his in his belt; Porthos and Aramis sheathed their swords.

"Oh! D'Artagnan! my dearly loved D'Artagnan, you come at last, you have not deceived me, it is really you?"

"Yes, yes, Constance! re-united."

"Oh! *she* in vain told me that you would not come; I still hoped; I did not wish to fly: I was right! How happy I am!"

At the word *she*, Athos, who had seated himself, jumped up.

"*She!* who is *she*?" asked D'Artagnan.

"My companion, who, through friendship for me, wished to save me from my persecutors; who, taking you for the guards of the Cardinal, has just fled."

"Your companion!" cried D'Artagnan, becoming paler than the white veil of his mistress; "what companion do you mean?"

"The lady whose carriage was at the door, who said that she was your friend, D'Artagnan, to whom you told everything."

"Her name! her name!" cried D'Artagnan; "do you not know her name?"

"Yes, it was pronounced before me; wait—but how strange it is—Oh! my God! my head is becoming confused; I can no longer see."

"Help, my friends! her hands are frozen!" cried D'Artagnan; "she is fainting!"

While Porthos shouted for help at the top of his powerful voice, Aramis ran to the table to pour out a glass of water; but he

stopped short on seeing the terrible change which had overspread the features of Athos, who, standing at the table, his hair on end, his eyes wide with terror, was looking at one of the glasses, and appeared to be a prey to some horrible suspicion.

"Oh!" said Athos, "it is impossible! God will not permit such a crime."

"Water, water!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Poor woman, poor woman!" murmured Athos, in a broken voice.

Madame Bonacieux reopened her eyes at the kisses of D'Artagnan.

"She is coming round," cried the young man. "Thank Heaven."

"Madame," said Athos, "in Heaven's name whose is this empty glass?"

"Mine, sir," replied the young woman, in a dying voice.

"But who poured you out the wine in that glass?"

"*She.*"

"But who is *she*?"

"Ah! I remember—the Countess de Winter."

The four friends uttered one and the same cry, but that of Athos was loudest.

At this moment the face of Madame Bonacieux became livid, and she fell panting into the arms of Porthos and Aramis.

D'Artagnan seized the hands of Athos with an anguish difficult to describe.

"You think," he said; but his voice was choked by a sob.

"I believe everything," said Athos, biting his lips till the blood came.

"D'Artagnan! D'Artagnan! where are you? Do not leave me; you see that I am going to die."

D'Artagnan let go the hands of Athos, and ran to her. His handsome features were distorted, and the perspiration was running from his forehead.

"In the name of Heaven! run, call! Porthos, Aramis, ask for help."

"Useless," said Athos, "useless; there is no counter-poison for that which has been administered."

"Yes, yes, help! help!" murmured Madame Bonacieux.

Then, summoning up all her strength, she took the head of the young man between her hands, gazed upon it for a moment, as if her soul had passed into her eyes, and, with a sob, she pressed her lips to his.

" Constance ! Constance ! " cried D'Artagnan.

A sigh escaped from the mouth of Madame Bonacieux, lightly touching that of D'Artagnan ; the sigh of a chaste and loving soul ascending to Heaven.

D'Artagnan clasped the dead body in his arms.

Porthos wept, Aramis shook his fist at Heaven, Athos made the sign of the Cross.

At this moment a man appeared at the door, almost as pale as those who were in the room, and looking round him, saw Madame Bonacieux dead and D'Artagnan in a faint.

" I was not mistaken," he said ; " there is M. d'Artagnan, and you are his three friends, Messieurs Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

Those whose names had been pronounced looked at the stranger with astonishment.

" Gentlemen," he continued, " like myself, you are looking for a woman, who must have passed this way," he said with a terrible smile, " for I see a dead body there."

The three friends remained mute.

" Gentlemen," added the stranger, " since you do not recognize a man who probably owes you his life twice over, I must name myself. I am Lord de Winter, the brother-in-law of that woman."

The three friends uttered a cry of surprise. Athos rose and held out his hand.

" Welcome, my lord," he said ; " you are one of us."

" I left Portsmouth five hours after her," said Lord de Winter ; " I arrived here three hours after her at Boulogne. I missed her by twenty minutes at Saint-Omer ; at last at Lilliers I lost her trace. I was wandering about at random when I saw you ; I recognized D'Artagnan, and called out, but you did not hear, and my horse was too tired to catch you up."

" You see," said Athos to Lord de Winter, pointing to Madame Bonacieux, who was dead, and to D'Artagnan, whom Porthos and Aramis were endeavouring to recall to life.

" Are they both dead ? " asked Lord de Winter.

" No, fortunately ; D'Artagnan has merely fainted."

At this moment D'Artagnan opened his eyes. He tore himself from the arms of Porthos and Aramis, and fell like a madman on the body of his mistress.

Athos rose, approached his friend with a slow solemn step, embraced him tenderly, and, as he burst into sobs, said to him in his noble and persuasive voice :

" My friend, be a man ; women weep over the dead, men avenge them."

" Oh, yes, if it be to avenge her, I am ready to follow you."

Athos took advantage of this moment to make a sign to Porthos and Aramis to go and fetch the Superioress.

The two friends met her in the corridor, quite bewildered by so many events ; she called some of the nuns, who, quite contrary to the rules of the convent, found themselves in the presence of five men.

" Madame," said Athos, taking the arm of D'Artagnan in his, " we leave to your pious care the body of this unfortunate woman. She was an angel upon earth before being an angel in Heaven. Treat her as one of your sisters ; we will return some day and pray upon her tomb."

D'Artagnan laid his face on the breast of Athos and burst into tears.

" Weep," said Athos, " weep, heart full of love, of life, and youth. Alas ! I wish I could weep like you."

And he drew his friend away, affectionate as a father, consoling as a priest, and great as a man who had suffered much.

All five, followed by their valets holding their horses by the bridle, walked in the direction of the town of Béthune, and stopped at the first inn they met.

" But," said D'Artagnan, " are we not going to pursue that woman ? "

" Later," said Athos ; " I have some measures to take."

" She will escape us ! " cried the young man, " and it will be your fault, Athos."

" I will answer for her," replied he.

D'Artagnan had so much confidence in the word of his friend that he bowed his head and entered the inn without a word.

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other, understanding nothing of the assurance of Athos.

Lord de Winter thought that he spoke thus to deaden the pain of D'Artagnan.

" Now, gentlemen," said Athos, on learning that there were five rooms vacant, " let us retire ; D'Artagnan requires to be alone to weep and to sleep. I will see to everything, do not fear."

" But it seems to me," said Lord de Winter, " that if there are measures of vengeance to be adopted against the Countess, that concerns me ; she is my sister-in-law."

" She is my wife," said Athos.

D'Artagnan smiled, for he understood that Athos was sure of his revenge, since he revealed such a secret. Porthos and Aramis looked at each other and became pale. Lord de Winter thought that Athos was mad.

"Withdraw, then," said Athos, "and let me act. You see that in my quality of husband this matter concerns me. Only, D'Artagnan, if you have not lost it, hand me the paper which fell from the hat of that young man, and upon which the name of a village is written."

"Ah," said D'Artagnan, "I understand; that name in her handwriting——"

"You see," said Athos, "there is a God in Heaven."

CHAPTER LXIII

THE MAN WITH THE RED CLOAK

THE despair of Athos had given place to a concentrated grief which rendered still more lucid the brilliant mental faculties of this man.

Wholly engrossed with one idea, that of the promise which he had made and the responsibility he had assumed, he was the last to retire to his room; he begged the host to procure him a map of the province, from which he learned that three different roads led from Béthune to Armentières. He sent for the valets.

Planchet, Grimaud, Mousqueton, and Bazin presented themselves, and received very clear and precise orders from Athos.

They were to start the next morning at break of day, and go to Armentières, each by a different road. Athos opened the campaign with the valets, because, when making inquiries, they would inspire less distrust than their masters, and would meet with more sympathy on the part of those they addressed. Lastly, Milady knew the masters but not the valets; on the other hand, the valets knew Milady perfectly well.

All four were to meet at eleven o'clock the next day; if they had discovered the hiding-place of Milady, three were to remain on guard and the fourth was to return to Béthune to give information to Athos and to act as a guide.

These arrangements made, the valets retired in their turn.

Athos then got up, buckled on his sword, enveloped himself in his cloak, and left the inn. It was about ten o'clock, at which hour the streets are little frequented in the country. Athos,

however, was evidently looking for some one to whom he could address a question. At last he met a belated inhabitant, and said a few words to him; the man to whom he spoke drew back in terror; however, he replied to the musketeer, giving him an indication. Athos offered the man half a pistole to accompany him, but he refused.

Happily, a beggar was passing by, who approached Athos to ask for charity. Athos offered him a crown to accompany him where he was going. The beggar hesitated, but the sight of the money glittering in the dark decided him, and he went on before Athos. At the angle of a street he showed him a small isolated house, dismal and solitary; Athos approached it, while the beggar, who had received his reward, made off at full speed.

Athos went round the house, which was painted a reddish colour, before he could find the door; no light pierced through the chinks of the shutters, no noise would have led one to suppose that it was inhabited; it was gloomy and mute as a tomb.

Athos knocked three times before eliciting an answer. At the third knock, however, steps were heard inside the house; at last the door opened slightly, and a tall man, with a pale complexion and black hair and beard, appeared.

Athos and he exchanged some words in a low voice, then the man made a sign to the musketeer that he could enter.

The man whom Athos had come so far to find, and whom he had had such difficulty in discovering, showed him into his laboratory, where he was occupied in wiring the bones of a skeleton. The body had been arranged: the skull alone was on the table.

Athos threw an indifferent glance over the objects we have just described, and on the invitation of the person in quest of whom he had come, sat down beside him.

Then he explained the cause of his visit, and the service he required; but he had hardly made his request, when the unknown, who remained standing in front of the musketeer, recoiled with terror and refused. Then Athos drew a little paper from his pocket upon which were written two lines accompanied by a signature and a seal, and presented it to the man who had too prematurely showed signs of repugnance. The man had no sooner read these lines, seen that signature, and recognized that seal, than he bowed to indicate that he had no further objection to make, and that he was ready to obey.

Athos asked for nothing more; he rose, bowed, left the house, and returning to his inn, shut himself up in his room.

At daybreak D'Artagnan entered and asked what was to be done. Athos told him to wait.

A few minutes afterward, the Superioress of the convent sent word to the musketeers that the funeral would take place at noon. She had no tidings of the poisoner, only that she must have fled by the garden.

At the appointed hour Lord de Winter and the four friends went to the convent; the bells tolled, and the grating of the choir was closed; in the middle of the choir was the body of the victim, dressed as a novice. On each side of the choir, and behind the grating leading to the convent, were the Carmelites, who listened to divine worship, and joined in the hymns of the priests, without seeing, or being seen by the profane.

At the door of the chapel D'Artagnan felt his courage once more giving way, he turned round to look for Athos, but he had disappeared.

Faithful to his mission of vengeance, Athos had gone to the garden; and there on the sand, following the light footsteps of that woman, who left such a bloody trace wherever she passed, he went as far as the door leading into the wood; he had it opened, and plunged into the forest.

There his doubts were confirmed; the road by which the carriage had disappeared ran round the wood.

Athos followed the road for some distance, his eyes fixed on the ground; slight spots of blood showed that either the outrider or one of the horses must have been wounded.

Near Festubert a larger trace of blood appeared; the soil had been trampled by horses. Between the forest and that accusing spot were to be seen the same prints of little feet; the carriage had stopped.

It was at this place, then, that Milady had left the woods, and had got into the carriage.

Satisfied with this discovery, which confirmed all his suspicions, Athos returned to the inn, where he found Planchet, who was waiting for him with impatience.

Everything was as Athos had foreseen.

Planchet had followed the road; like Athos, he had noticed the traces of blood and the spot where the carriage had stopped; but he had pushed matters further than Athos; while taking refreshment at the village of Festubert, he had learned that a wounded man accompanied by a lady who was travelling in a post-chaise had been obliged to stop, being unable to go any further.

The accident had been laid to the account of soldiers who had attempted to stop the chaise in the wood. The man had remained in the village ; the lady had taken fresh horses and gone on.

Planchet went in search of the postilion, and found him.

He had taken the lady as far as Fromelles, whence she had started for Armentières.

Planchet took a short cut and reached Armentières at seven o'clock.

There was but one *hôtel*. Planchet went there and represented himself as a lackey in search of a place.

He had not spoken more than ten minutes with the people of the inn before he knew that a lady, travelling alone, had arrived at eleven the previous evening, had taken a room, had sent for the landlord, and had told him that she wished to spend some time in the neighbourhood.

Planchet did not want to know anything more.

He repaired to the meeting-place, found the other three lackeys at their post, placed them as sentinels at the issues of the inn, and returned to Athos, who had just received this information when the three friends entered.

" What is to be done ? " asked D'Artagnan.

" Wait," replied Athos.

Each one retired to his room.

At eight o'clock in the evening Athos gave orders for the horses to be saddled, and sent word to Lord de Winter that he and his friends were preparing for an expedition.

A moment later all five were ready.

Each one looked to his arms.

Athos came down last, and found D'Artagnan, who was growing impatient, already in the saddle.

" Patience," said Athos ; " some one else is wanting."

The four horsemen looked round with astonishment, wondering who the missing person could be.

At this moment Planchet brought round the horse of Athos.

The musketeer jumped lightly into the saddle.

" Wait for me," he said ; " I am coming back." And he galloped away.

A quarter of an hour later he returned, accompanied by a man who was masked and wrapped in a large red cloak.

Lord de Winter and the three musketeers looked at each other interrogatively. None was able to tell the other who this man was.

At nine o'clock the little cavalcade, guided by Planchet, set out, taking the road which had been followed by the carriage.

It was a sad sight, these six men riding in silence, plunged each in his own thoughts, dark as despair, gloomy as punishment.

CHAPTER LXIV

THE TRIAL

IT was a dark and stormy night, and big clouds were chasing each other along the sky, obscuring the stars; the moon would not rise before midnight.

Now and then, by the light of a flash of lightning which gleamed on the horizon, they caught a glimpse of the white and solitary road; then everything was again in darkness.

Several times either Lord de Winter, or Porthos, or Aramis, tried to enter into conversation with the man in the red cloak; but to each interrogation he bowed without replying.

The horsemen then understood that the unknown had some reason for preserving silence, and they ceased addressing him.

Besides, the storm increased, flashes of lightning succeeded each other rapidly, the thunder began to roll, and the wind, forerunner of the tempest, began to whistle.

A little beyond Fromelles the storm burst. They wrapped themselves in their cloaks. There remained three leagues to go, which were accomplished in torrents of rain.

Just as the cavalcade was about to arrive at the post-house, a man, sheltered by a tree, stepped into the middle of the road, putting his finger on his lips.

Athos recognized Grimaud.

Grimaud stretched out his arm, and by the bluish gleam of the serpent of fire they distinguished a little isolated house on the bank of the river, at a hundred paces from a ferry. There was a light in the window.

"We have arrived," said Athos.

At this moment a man who was lying in a ditch rose.

It was Mousqueton.

He pointed to the window with the light in it.

"She is there," he said.

"And Bazin?" asked Athos.

"While I guarded the window he guarded the door."

"Good," said Athos; "you are faithful servants."

Athos sprang from his horse, handing the bridle to Grimaud, and advanced to the window, after making a sign to his friends to go round to the door.

The little house was surrounded by a quickset hedge, through which Athos forced his way, arriving at the window, which was without shutters, but the half-curtains of which were closed. He clambered up on a stone ledge so as to be able to see over the curtains.

By the light of a lamp he saw a woman wrapped in a dark-coloured mantle, seated on a stool near a dying fire ; her elbows were placed on an old table, and she was holding her head in her two hands, white as ivory. Her face could not be seen, but a sinister smile passed over the lips of Athos ; it was the woman he sought.

At this moment a horse neighed.

Milady raised her head, saw the pale face of Athos at the window, and screamed.

Athos, understanding that he had been recognized, pushed in the window with his knee, and, like the spectre of vengeance, leaped into the room.

Milady ran to the door and opened it. More pale and more threatening still than Athos, D'Artagnan stood on the threshold.

Milady recoiled, uttering a cry.

D'Artagnan, fearing lest she should have some means of escape, drew his pistol from his belt, but Athos raised his hand.

" Put back that weapon, D'Artagnan," said he ; " this woman must be tried, not assassinated. Wait a moment, D'Artagnan ; you shall be satisfied. Come in, gentlemen."

D'Artagnan obeyed, for Athos had the solemn voice and the commanding gesture of a judge sent by the Lord Himself.

Behind D'Artagnan came Porthos, Aramis, Lord de Winter, and the man in the red cloak. The four valets guarded the door and the window.

Milady had fallen into a chair, her hands stretched out as if to avert this terrible apparition ; on seeing her brother-in-law she uttered a scream.

" What do you want ? " she cried.

" We want," said Athos, " Charlotte Backson, once called the Comtesse de la Fère, and then Lady de Winter."

" It is I, it is I ! " she murmured in the greatest terror ; " what do you want ? "

" We want to try you according to your crimes," said Athos ;

" you will be free to defend yourself, and to justify yourself, if you can. M. d'Artagnan, it is for you to speak first."

D'Artagnan stepped forward.

" Before God and men," he said, " I accuse this woman of having poisoned Constance Bonacieux, who died yesterday evening."

He turned toward Porthos and Aramis.

" We bear witness to this," said the two musketeers together.

D'Artagnan continued :

" Before God and men, I accuse this woman of having tried to poison me with some wine she sent from Villeroi. God saved me ! but a man died in my place. His name was Brisemont."

" We bear witness to this ! " said Porthos and Aramis.

" Before God and men, I accuse this woman of having incited me to kill Baron de Wardes ; and as no one is here to bear witness to this accusation, I swear to it myself. I have spoken."

And D'Artagnan crossed over to the other side of the room with Porthos and Aramis.

" It is your turn, my lord," said Athos.

" Before God and men, I accuse this woman of having caused the Duke of Buckingham to be murdered," said Lord de Winter.

" The Duke of Buckingham murdered ! " exclaimed with one voice all present.

" Yes," said the Baron, " murdered. On receiving your letter I had this woman arrested, and committed her to the charge of a loyal servant. She corrupted that man ; she placed a dagger in his hand ; she made him kill the Duke, and perhaps, by this, Felton has paid with his head the crime of this fiendish woman."

The judges shuddered at this revelation.

" That is not all," said Lord de Winter. " My brother, who left his fortune to you, died after three hours of a strange disease, which left livid spots all over his body. Sister, how did your husband die ? "

" Horror ! " cried Porthos and Aramis.

" Assassin of Buckingham, assassin of Felton, assassin of my brother, I demand justice, and declare that, if it be not granted, I will execute it myself."

And Lord de Winter went and stood beside D'Artagnan, leaving the place free for another accuser.

Milady allowed her head to fall between her hands, and endeavoured to collect her ideas, which were confused in a deadly swirl.

" It is my turn," said Athos, trembling as a lion trembles at the sight of a serpent. " I married this woman when she was a young girl. I married her, in spite of my family. I gave her my wealth, I gave her my name ; and one day I discovered that she had been branded. This woman was marked with a *fleur-de-lis* on the left shoulder."

" Oh," said Milady, rising, " I defy you to find the tribunal which pronounced that infamous sentence. I defy you to find the person who executed it ! "

" Silence ! " said a voice. " It is for me to reply to that ! "

And the man with the red cloak approached in his turn.

" Who is this man ? Who is this man ? " cried Milady, suffocated with terror, and perfectly livid.

All eyes were directed toward that man ; for to all, except to Athos, he was unknown.

Athos also looked at him with as much amazement as the others, for he was not aware how he could be a party to the terrible drama then being performed.

After having approached Milady with a slow and solemn step, till the table alone separated them, he removed his mask.

Milady looked for some time with increasing terror at that pale face, the only expression in which was icy impassibility ; then suddenly :

" Oh, no, no ! " she said, springing up and cringing against the wall. " No, no ! it is an apparition from Hell ! It is not he. Help ! help ! " she screamed in a hoarse voice, turning toward the wall, as if to make a passage through it with her hands.

" But who are you, then ? " cried those present.

" Ask that woman," said the man in the red cloak ; " for you see that she recognizes me."

" The executioner of Lille ! " exclaimed Milady, a prey to the wildest terror, and clinging to the wall in order not to fall.

Every one drew back, and the man in the red cloak remained alone in the middle of the room.

" Oh, mercy, mercy ! Pardon me ! " cried the wretched woman, falling on her knees.

The unknown man allowed silence to be re-established.

" I told you she recognized me," he said. " Yes ; I am the executioner of the town of Lille, and this is my history :

" This young woman was formerly a young girl as beautiful as she is to-day. She was a nun in the convent of the Benedictines of Templemar. A young priest, with a simple and trusting heart, did service at the convent chapel. She undertook to

seduce him, and she succeeded; she would have seduced a saint.

"The vows of both were sacred, irrevocable; their connexion could not last long without ruining both. She persuaded him to leave the country with her. But to fly to another part of France, where they might live undisturbed, because unknown, required money; neither of them had any. The priest stole the sacred vessels, and sold them; but as they were preparing to start together, they were arrested.

"A week afterward she seduced the gaoler's son, and made her escape.

"The young priest was condemned to ten years in irons, and to be branded. I was the executioner of the town of Lille. I was obliged to brand the guilty man; and the guilty man, gentlemen, was my brother!

"I swore then that this woman, who had worked his ruin, who was more than his accomplice, since she had driven him to the crime, should at least share the punishment.

"I suspected the place where she was hidden; I pursued her, I overtook her, I bound her, and I branded her as I had branded my brother.

"The day after my return to Lille my brother also managed to escape. I was accused of complicity, and I was condemned to remain in prison in his place until he should return. My poor brother was not aware of this judgment. He had rejoined this woman. They fled together to Berry, where he obtained a small living.

"She passed herself off as his sister.

"The lord of the land upon which the chapel was situated saw this pretended sister, and fell in love with her—in love to such a degree, that he proposed to marry her. Then she left the man she had ruined for the man she was destined to ruin, and became Countess de la Fère——"

All eyes were fixed upon Athos, who made a sign that everything which the executioner had said was true.

"Then," continued the executioner, "mad with despair, and determined to get rid of an existence which she had rendered unendurable, my poor brother returned to Lille. On learning that I had been condemned in his place, he gave himself up as a prisoner, and hung himself the same night.

"It is only just to say that those who condemned me kept their word. No sooner had the dead body of my brother been identified, than I was released.

" This is the crime of which I accuse her ; that is why she was branded."

" M. d'Artagnan," said Athos, " what is the penalty which you demand against this woman ? "

" The penalty of death ! " replied D'Artagnan.

" My Lord de Winter," continued Athos, " what penalty do you demand ? "

" The penalty of death ! " replied Lord de Winter.

" Messieurs Porthos and Aramis, you who are her judges, what is the penalty which you pronounce against this woman ? "

" The penalty of death ! " replied the two musketeers in a hollow voice.

Milady uttered a dreadful shriek, and dragged herself toward her judges on her knees.

Athos stretched out his hand toward her.

" Charlotte Backson, Comtesse de la Fère, Lady de Winter," he said, " your crimes have wearied men upon earth, and God in Heaven. If you know any prayer, repeat it, for you are condemned, and you are going to die ! "

At these words, which left no hope, Milady rose, drew herself up to her full height, and tried to speak. But her strength failed her ; she felt that a powerful and implacable hand had seized upon her and was dragging her along ; she made no attempt at resistance, and left the cottage.

Lord de Winter, D'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis followed her.

The valets accompanied their masters, and the room remained empty, with its broken window, its door open, and its smoky lamp burning mournfully on the table.

CHAPTER LXV

THE EXECUTION

IT was nearly midnight, and the moon, reddened by the last traces of the storm, rose behind the little town of Armentières, the dark outline of whose houses and whose skeleton-like belfry stood boldly out in the pale light.

In front, the Lys rolled its heavy waters like a river of molten lead, while on the further bank was seen a dark mass of trees.

To the left was an old abandoned windmill, in the ruins of which an owl was uttering its shrill and monotonous cry.

Here and there in the plain, to the right and left of the road which the lugubrious procession followed, appeared stunted trees which looked like deformed dwarfs.

From time to time a flash of lightning covered the whole breadth of the horizon. Not a breath of wind stirred in the heavy atmosphere. The silence of death weighed upon Nature; the soil was damp and slippery with the rain which had just fallen.

Two valets helped Milady along, each holding an arm; the executioner marched behind her, and Lord de Winter, D'Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis behind the executioner. Planchet and Bazin came last.

The two valets led Milady to the river side. Her mouth was silent, but her eyes spoke with inexpressible eloquence, supplicating in turn each one who looked at her.

As she found herself some steps in advance, she said to the valets:

"A thousand pistoles each, if you protect my flight; but if you hand me over to your masters, I have persons near here to avenge me, and who will make you pay dearly for my death."

Grimaud hesitated; Mousqueton trembled all over.

Athos, who had heard the sound of Milady's voice, quickly approached, and so did Lord de Winter.

"Send away these valets," he said; "she has spoken to them; they are no longer to be depended upon."

Planchet and Bazin were called, and replaced Grimaud and Mousqueton.

On reaching the bank of the river, the executioner approached, and tied her hands and feet.

Then she broke silence and cried:

"You are cowards, you are wretched assassins; you are ten to murder a woman. Take care; though I am beyond help, I shall be avenged!"

"You are not a woman," said Athos coldly; "you do not belong to the human race; you are a demon, escaped from that hell to which you are about to return."

"Ah, my virtuous gentlemen," said Milady, "remember that he who touches a hair of my head is in his turn an assassin."

"The executioner can kill, madame, without being an assassin," said the man in the red cloak.

And as he bound her while speaking these words, Milady uttered two or three wild cries, which had a gloomy and strange effect, as they rose in the night and lost themselves in the depths of the wood.

" But if I am guilty, if I have committed the crimes of which you accuse me," shrieked Milady, " take me before a tribunal ; you are not judges, to condemn me."

" I proposed Tyburn to you," said Lord de Winter ; " why did you not accept ? "

" Because I did not wish to die ! " exclaimed Milady, struggling ; " because I am too young to die ! "

" The woman whom you poisoned at Béthune was younger than you, madame, and yet she is dead," said D'Artagnan.

" I will enter a cloister and become a nun," said Milady.

" You were in a cloister," said the executioner, " and you left it to ruin my brother."

Milady uttered a cry of terror, and fell on her knees.

The executioner lifted her up in his arms, to carry her to the boat.

" Oh, my God ! " she cried, " are you going to drown me ? "

There was something so piercing in these cries, that D'Artagnan, who at first had been the most bitter in pursuit of Milady, sank down on the stump of a tree and covered his ears with his hands ; and yet he heard her threatening and screaming.

D'Artagnan was the youngest of all the men ; his heart failed him.

" Oh, I cannot witness this fearful spectacle ! I cannot consent to this woman dying thus ! "

Milady, who had heard these words, recovered a gleam of hope.

" D'Artagnan ! D'Artagnan ! " she cried, " remember that I loved you ! "

The young man rose and took a step toward her.

But Athos drew his sword and stood in the way.

" If you take another step, D'Artagnan," he said, " we cross swords."

D'Artagnan fell on his knees and prayed.

" Come," said Athos to the executioner, " perform your duty."

" Willingly," said the executioner, " for as sure as I am a good Catholic, I firmly believe that I am acting right in accomplishing my functions with regard to this woman."

Athos took a step toward Milady.

" I pardon you," he said, " the ill you have done me ; I pardon you my career destroyed, my honour lost, my love defiled, and my salvation for ever compromised by the despair into which you have cast me. Die in peace."

Lord de Winter advanced in his turn.

" I pardon you," he said, " the poisoning of my brother, the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham ; I pardon you the death of that poor Felton ; I pardon you your attempts on my life. Die in peace."

" And I," said D'Artagnan, " pardon me, madame, for having, by a trick unworthy of a gentleman, excited your rage ; and in exchange, I pardon you the murder of my poor friend, and your cruel attempts at revenge on myself. I pardon you and I weep over you. Die in peace."

" I am lost," murmured Milady ; " I must die."

Then she stood up, and threw around her one of those looks which seemed to flash from an eye of flame.

She saw nothing. She listened, and heard nothing.

She was surrounded by enemies.

" Where am I going to die ? " she asked.

" On the other bank," said the executioner.

Then he lifted her into the boat, and as he was entering himself, Athos placed a sum of money in his hands.

" Here," said he, " is the price of the execution ; let it be plain that we act as judges."

" Yes," said the executioner ; " and now, let this lady know that I accomplish, not my trade, but my duty."

And he threw the money into the river.

The boat moved toward the left bank of the Lys, carrying the guilty woman and the executioner.

The others remained on the right bank ; they had fallen on their knees.

The boat glided gently along the rope of the ferry, and they saw it reach the opposite bank.

Milady, during the crossing, had managed to untie the cord which bound her feet ; on reaching the other side she sprang lightly to land and took to flight. But the soil was damp ; she slipped and fell on her knees.

No doubt a superstitious idea struck her ; she understood that Heaven refused its aid, and she remained in the same attitude—head bent forward, and hands clasped.

Then they saw the executioner slowly raise his two arms, a ray of moonlight gleamed on his great sword ; the two arms fell, they heard the hiss of the blade, and the cry of the victim, then a headless mass sunk beneath the blow.

The executioner took off his red cloak, stretched it on the ground, placed the remains in it, tied it up by the four corners, threw it over his shoulder, and re-entered the boat. When he

had reached the middle of the Lys he stopped, and holding his burden over the river :

" Let the justice of God be done ! " said he, in a loud voice.

And he allowed the dead body to fall into the water.

Three days later the four musketeers re-entered Paris ; they were within the limit of their furlough, and the same evening they went to pay their usual visit to M. de Tréville.

" Well, gentlemen," asked the gallant captain, " did you enjoy your excursion ? "

" Prodigiously," replied Athos, in his name and that of his comrades.

CONCLUSION

ON the 6th of the following month, the King, keeping the promise he had made to the Cardinal to return to La Rochelle, left the capital, still under the shock of the news which had just spread that Buckingham had been murdered.

Although forewarned that the man she loved was in danger, the Queen, when his death was announced, refused to believe it ; she even had the imprudence to exclaim :

" It is false ; he has just written to me ! "

But the next day she was obliged to believe the fatal news ; La Porte, detained like every one else in England by the orders of Charles I, arrived with the last mournful present which Buckingham sent to the Queen.

The joy of the King had been exuberant ; he took no pains to hide it, and gave way to it with affectation in presence of the Queen. Louis XIII, like all weak minds, was wanting in generosity.

But soon the King became once more gloomy and ill ; his face seldom brightened up for long ; he felt that in returning to the camp he was about to resume his bondage, and yet he returned. The Cardinal fascinated him like a serpent, and he was as the bird which hovers from bough to bough without being able to escape. So the return to La Rochelle was gloomy in the extreme.

Our four friends caused much astonishment among their comrades ; they rode together side by side with dull eye and drooping head. Athos alone from time to time raised his broad forehead ; his eyes would flash, a bitter smile passed over his lips, then, like his comrades, he allowed himself once more to fall into a kind of dream.

As soon as the escort arrived in a town, and the King had been conducted to his quarters, the four friends retired to some out-of-the-way inn, where they neither drank nor gambled ; but they spoke in a whisper, looking to see that no one was listening.

One day that the King had halted on the road to fly a magpie, and that the four friends, according to their custom, instead of following the chase, had stopped at an inn on the high road, a man, who came at full gallop from La Rochelle, stopped at the door to take a glass of wine, and looked into the room where the musketeers were at table.

" Halloa, M. d'Artagnan ! " said he, " is it not you whom I see yonder ? "

D'Artagnan raised his head and uttered a cry of joy. That man, who had haunted his life, was the mysterious stranger of Meung, of the Rue des Fossoyeurs and of Arras.

D'Artagnan drew his sword and darted to the door. But this time, instead of flying, the unknown leaped from his horse and advanced to meet D'Artagnan.

" Ah, sir ! " exclaimed the young man, " I have then caught you up at last ; this time you shall not escape me."

" Nor is it my intention, sir ; for this time I was looking for you : in the name of the King I arrest you. You must hand me your sword, and without resistance ; it is a matter of losing your head, I warn you."

" Who are you ? " asked D'Artagnan, lowering his sword, but not yet surrendering it.

" I am the Chevalier de Rochefort, the equerry of the Cardinal de Richelieu, and I have orders to bring you before his Eminence."

" We are returning to his Eminence, sir," said Athos, advancing, " and you will doubtless accept the parole of M. d'Artagnan, who is going in a straight line to La Rochelle."

" My orders are to place him in the hands of the guards, who are to bring him to camp."

" We will serve as his guards, sir, on our word as gentlemen ; but, on our word as gentlemen too," added Athos, frowning. " M. d'Artagnan shall not leave us."

The Chevalier de Rochefort threw a glance behind him, and saw that Porthos and Aramis had placed themselves between him and the door. He understood that he was completely at the mercy of these four men.

" Gentlemen," he said, " if M. d'Artagnan will give me his sword, and join his word of honour to yours, I shall be satisfied

with your promise to escort him to the quarters of the Cardinal."

"You have my parole, sir, and here is my sword," said D'Artagnan.

"That suits me all the better," added Rochefort, "as I must continue my journey."

"If it be to rejoin Milady," said Athos coldly, "it is useless, you will not find her."

"What has become of her?" asked Rochefort anxiously.

"Return to camp, and you shall know."

Rochefort remained thoughtful for a moment, then, as they were only one day's ride from Surgères, where the Cardinal was to come to meet the King, he determined to follow the advice of Athos and to return with them. Besides, this would offer him the advantage of being able to keep an eye on his prisoner.

The next day at three o'clock they reached Surgères. The Cardinal was waiting for Louis XIII. The minister and the King exchanged several embraces, and congratulated each other on the lucky chance which had rid France of a bitter enemy who was raising all Europe against her. After which the Cardinal, who had been informed by Rochefort that D'Artagnan had been arrested, and who was in a hurry to see him, took leave of the King, inviting him to come the next day to visit the dyke, which had been finished.

On returning to his quarters the Cardinal found D'Artagnan standing at the door without his sword, and the three musketeers armed. This time, as he had force on his side, he looked at them severely, and made a sign to D'Artagnan to follow him.

D'Artagnan obeyed.

"We shall wait for you, D'Artagnan," said Athos, loud enough for the Cardinal to hear him.

His Eminence frowned, stopped for a moment, then went on without uttering a word.

D'Artagnan entered behind the Cardinal, and behind D'Artagnan the door was guarded.

His Eminence passed into the room which served him as a cabinet, and made a sign to Rochefort to introduce the musketeer.

Rochefort obeyed, and retired.

D'Artagnan remained alone with the Cardinal. This was his second interview with Richelieu, and he acknowledged afterward that he was sure it would be his last.

Richelieu remained standing, leaning against the chimney-piece: a table stood between him and D'Artagnan.

"Sir," said the Cardinal, "you were arrested by my orders."

"So they told me, Monseigneur."

"Do you know why?"

"No, Monseigneur; because the only thing for which I might be arrested is still unknown to your Eminence."

"Oh! What does that mean?"

"If your Eminence will first tell me what crimes are imputed to me, I will afterward tell you what I have done."

"Crimes are imputed to you, sir, which have made higher heads than yours fall."

"What crimes, Monseigneur?" asked D'Artagnan, with an amount of calm which astonished even the Cardinal.

"They accuse you of having corresponded with the enemies of the kingdom, of having surprised State secrets, and of having tried to defeat the plans of your General."

"And who imputes these crimes to me, Monseigneur?" said D'Artagnan, who was certain that the accusation came from Milady. "A woman branded by the justice of her country; a woman who married one man in France and another in England; a woman who poisoned her second husband, and who tried to poison me myself!"

"What say you?" exclaimed the Cardinal, in amazement. "Of what woman are you speaking?"

"Of Lady de Winter," replied D'Artagnan; "of whose crimes no doubt your Eminence was ignorant when you honoured her with your confidence."

"Sir," said the Cardinal, "if Lady de Winter has committed the crimes of which you speak, she shall be punished."

"She is already punished, Monseigneur."

"And who punished her?"

"We did."

"Is she in prison?

"She is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the Cardinal, who could not believe his ears. "Dead? Did you say that she was dead?"

"Three times she tried to assassinate me, and I pardoned her. But she killed the woman I loved; then my friends and I took her, tried her, and condemned her."

D'Artagnan then related how Madame Bonacieux had been poisoned in the convent at Béthune, the trial in the isolated house, and the execution on the bank of the Lys.

A shudder ran through the Cardinal's whole body, and yet he did not shudder easily.

But suddenly, as if obeying the influence of an unexpressed thought, the face of the Cardinal, gloomy till then, brightened by degrees, and attained the most perfect serenity.

"So then," said the Cardinal in a tone the gentleness of which contrasted with the severity of his words, "you constituted yourselves judges, without reflecting that those who have not the mission to punish, and who do so, commit murder."

"Monseigneur, I swear that I never had any intention of defending my head against you. I will undergo the punishment which your Eminence thinks fit to inflict on me. I do not value life sufficiently to fear death."

"Yes, I know that you are a man of courage, sir," said the Cardinal, in an almost affectionate tone; "I can therefore tell you, beforehand, that you will be tried, and even condemned."

"Another might reply to your Eminence that he has his pardon in his pocket; I will be satisfied with saying: Order Monseigneur; I am ready."

"Your pardon?" said Richelieu, in surprise.

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"And signed by whom? by the King?"

And the Cardinal pronounced these words with a singular expression of disdain.

"No; by your Eminence."

"By me? You are mad, sir."

"Monseigneur will no doubt recognize his handwriting."

And D'Artagnan presented to the Cardinal the precious paper which Athos had taken from Milady, and which he had given to D'Artagnan for his protection.

His Eminence took the paper, and read with a slow voice, dwelling on each syllable:

"It is by my order that the bearer of this paper has done what he has just done.

"RICHELIEU

"THE CAMP OF LA ROCHELLE
"*August* 5, 1628"

The Cardinal, having read these two lines, fell into deep thought; but he did not restore the paper to D'Artagnan.

"He is reflecting how he will put me to death," thought D'Artagnan. "Well, he will see how a gentleman dies."

Richelieu continued to reflect, rolling and unrolling the paper in his hands.

At last he looked up, fixed his eagle eye on that fearless, open,

and intelligent countenance, read on that face furrowed by tears all the suffering endured during the past month, and reflected, for the third or fourth time, what a future this lad of twenty-one had before him, and what advantages his activity, his courage, and his wit might offer to a good master.

On the other hand, the crimes, the power, the infernal genius of Milady, had more than once alarmed him. He felt a secret joy at being rid of so dangerous an accomplice.

He slowly tore up the paper which D'Artagnan had so generously handed to him.

"I am lost!" said D'Artagnan to himself.

And he bowed deeply to the Cardinal, like a man who says: "Lord, Thy will be done!"

The Cardinal approached the table, and, without sitting down, wrote some lines on a piece of parchment, two-thirds of which had already been filled, and affixed his seal to it.

"This," said D'Artagnan, "is my condemnation. He means to spare me the tediousness of the Bastille and the delays of a trial, which is very kind of him."

"Here, sir," said the Cardinal, "I took from you one *carte blanche*; here is another. The name is wanting to this commission, and you can write it in yourself."

D'Artagnan hesitatingly took the paper, and glanced through it.

It was a lieutenancy in the Musketeers. He fell at the feet of the Cardinal.

"Monseigneur," he cried, "my life is yours; dispose of it henceforth; but this favour which you grant me, I do not deserve it; I have three friends, who are more meritorious and worthy——"

"You are a noble fellow, D'Artagnan," interrupted the Cardinal, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, and delighted at having conquered this rebellious nature. "Do what you like with the commission, but remember, that although the name is not inserted, it is to you that I give it."

"Your Eminence may be sure that I shall never forget it."

The Cardinal turned round, and called in a loud voice:

"Rochefort!"

The chevalier, who was no doubt behind the door, immediately entered.

"Rochefort," said the Cardinal, "you see M. d'Artagnan; I receive him among the number of my friends; embrace therefore, and be prudent if you wish to preserve your heads."

Rochefort and D'Artagnan embraced each other coolly; but the Cardinal was there, watching them with his vigilant eye.

They left the room at the same time.

"We shall meet again, shall we not, sir?"

"Whenever you like," said D'Artagnan.

"The opportunity will come," said Rochefort.

"What is that?" said the Cardinal, opening the door.

The two gentlemen smiled, shook each other by the hand, and saluted his Eminence.

"We were beginning to be impatient," said Athos.

"Here I am, my friends, not only free, but in favour."

"You will tell us all about it?"

"This very evening."

In the evening, D'Artagnan went to the quarters of Athos, whom he found emptying a bottle of Spanish wine; an occupation which he religiously accomplished every day.

He told him what had passed between the Cardinal and himself, and drew the commission from his pocket.

"Here it is, my dear Athos; it naturally belongs to you."

Athos smiled one of his soft and charming smiles.

"My friend," he said, "it is too much for Athos, not enough for the Comte de la Fère. Keep this commission; alas! you have paid dearly enough for it."

D'Artagnan left Athos, and went to find Porthos.

He found him magnificently dressed, and admiring himself in a looking-glass.

"Ah! ah!" said Porthos, "it is you! how do you think this costume suits me?"

"Excellently," said D'Artagnan; "but I come to propose you one which will suit you still better."

"Which?" asked Porthos.

"That of lieutenant in the Musketeers."

D'Artagnan related his interview with the Cardinal, and drew his commission from his pocket.

"Here," said he, "my dear friend, write your name upon it, and deal gently with me when I am under your orders."

Porthos threw his eyes over the commission, and returned it to D'Artagnan to the latter's amazement.

"Yes," he said, "I should be delighted, but I should not have time to enjoy the favour. During our expedition to Béthune, the husband of my duchess died; so that the strong box of the defunct opening its arms to me, I am going to marry the widow.

See, I was just trying on my wedding garment ; keep the lieutenancy, my dear fellow, keep it."

And he returned the commission to D'Artagnan.

The young man went to see Aramis. He found him on his knees.

He related his interview with the Cardinal, and for the third time drew the commission from his pocket.

" You, our friend, our man of intelligence, our invisible protector, accept this commission ; you have deserved it more than any of us by your wisdom and your counsels, which were always followed by happy results."

" Alas ! my dear friend," said Aramis, " our last adventures have quite disgusted me with life and with the sword. This time my mind is irrevocably made up ; after the siege I shall join the Lazarists. Keep this commission, D'Artagnan, the trade of arms suits you, you will make a brave and adventurous captain."

D'Artagnan, his eye moist with gratitude, and beaming with joy, returned to Athos, whom he found still at table, holding up his last glass of Malaga, and looking at it by the light of the lamp.

" Well ! " said he, " and they also have refused ! It was because no one is more worthy than yourself, my dear friend." And he took up a pen, wrote D'Artagnan's name on the parchment, and handed it back to him.

" I shall have no more friends then," said the young man, " alas ! nothing beyond bitter recollections."

And he allowed his head to fall between his hands, while two tears rolled down his cheeks.

" You are young," replied Athos, " and with time your bitter recollections will change into pleasing ones."

EPILOGUE

LA ROCHELLE, deprived of the assistance of the English fleet, and of the diversion promised by Buckingham, surrendered after a siege of a year. On October 28, 1628, the capitulation was signed.

The King made his entry into Paris on December 23 of the same year. He was given a triumphant welcome as if he had returned from conquering the enemy, and not Frenchmen. He entered by the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, under arches of evergreens.

D'Artagnan took possession of his rank. Porthos left the service and married, during the course of the following year, Madame Coquenard; the much-coveted strong box contained 800,000 livres.

Mousqueton had a magnificent livery, and the satisfaction—which had all his life been the object of his ambition—of standing up behind a gilded coach.

Aramis, after a trip to Lorraine, suddenly disappeared, and ceased writing to his friends. They learned afterward, through Madame de Chevreuse, who told it to two or three of her lovers, that he had taken the frock at Nancy.

Bazin became a lay brother.

Athos remained a musketeer under the orders of D'Artagnan until 1631, when, after a visit which he paid to Touraine, he left the service on the pretext of having inherited a small property in Roussillon.

Grimaud followed Athos.

D'Artagnan fought with Rochefort three times and wounded him three times.

"I shall probably kill you the fourth time," he said, holding out his hand and helping him to rise.

"It will be better for both of us to make it up," said the wounded man. "*Corbleu!* I am a better friend to you than you think, for on our first meeting, by saying a word to the Cardinal, I might have had your head cut off."

They embraced each other heartily, and this time without any mental reservation.

Planchet obtained from Rochefort the rank of sergeant in the Guards.

M. Bonacieux lived complacently, perfectly ignorant of what had become of his wife and caring less. One day he had the imprudence to recall himself to the recollection of the Cardinal; the Cardinal replied that he would provide for him for the future, and see that he wanted nothing.

And indeed, the next day M. Bonacieux, having left home at seven o'clock in the evening to go to the Louvre, did not reappear in the Rue des Fossoyeurs. The opinion of those best informed was that he was boarded and lodged in some royal castle at the expense of his generous Eminence.